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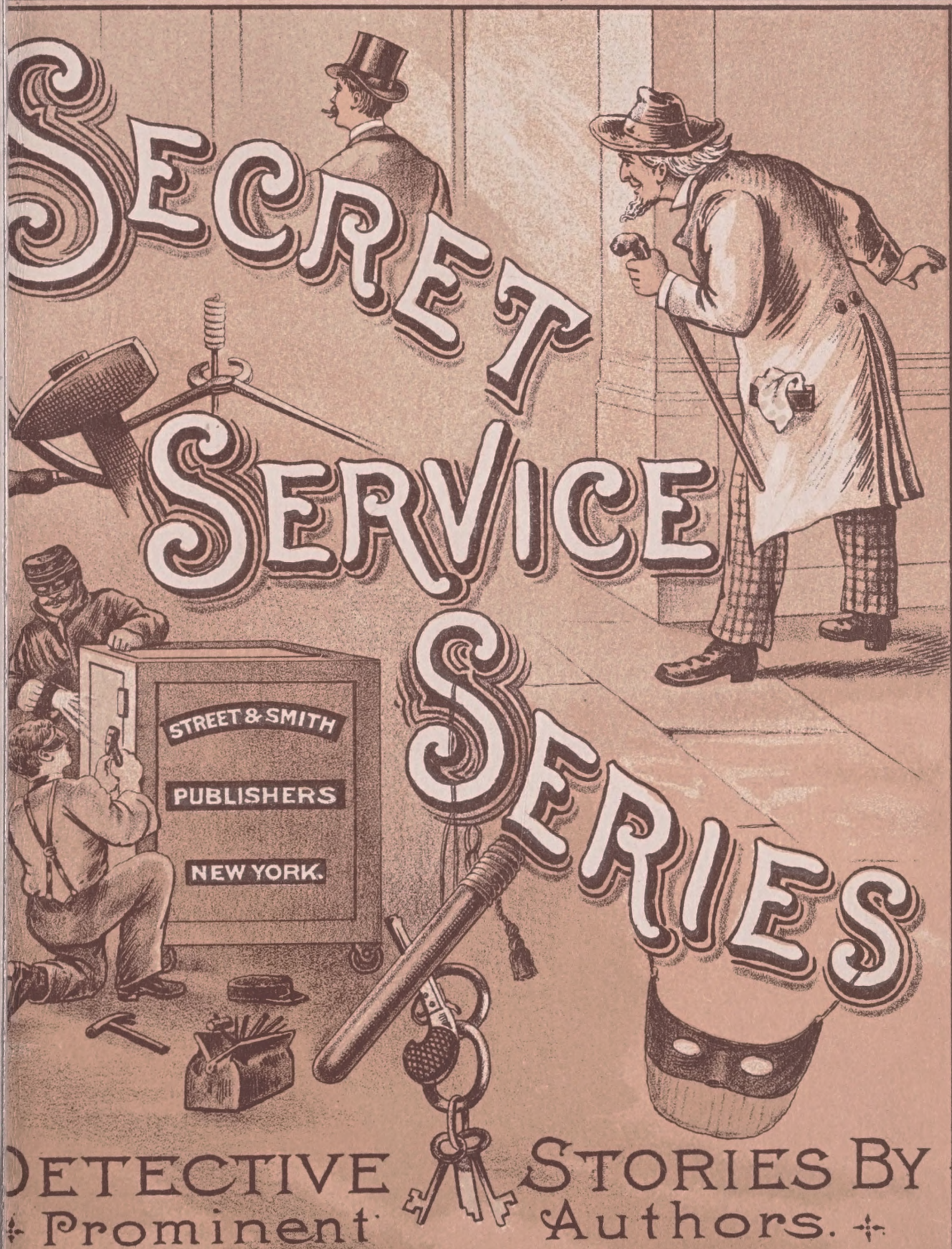
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

BOB YOUNGER'S FATE.

By EDWIN S. DEANE.

No. 28.





AS THE LIGHT FELL UPON THE INITIALS, MYRA, WITH A CRY OF AGONY, FELL BACKWARD IN A DEAD FAINT.—(P. 17.)

THE SECRET SERVICE SERIES—No. 28.

Issued Monthly.

DEVOTED TO STORIES OF THE DETECTION OF CRIME.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE, \$3 PER YEAR.

FEBRUARY, 1890.

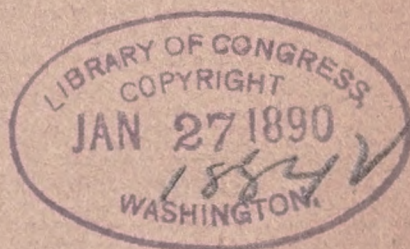
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BOB YOUNGER'S FATE.

BY

EDWIN S. DEANE.



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BOB YOUNGER'S FATE.

CHAPTER I.

A WOMAN'S SUSPICIONS.

"The bank has been robbed, sir!"

This was the alarming intelligence which came to the ears of Henry Ferry, President of the Fidelity Bank, Minneapolis, as he set foot on his own stoop after a six months' sojourn abroad.

His wife and daughter, who had been with him in Europe, also heard the startling intelligence, and Myra, the daughter, reeled against the railing, for the words had a peculiar significance to her.

The cashier of the bank, as she well knew, was Theo Howard, a young man of twenty-three, in whom she felt an ardent interest. In fact, he was her accepted lover.

"The bank robbed!" exclaimed Mr. Ferry; "when—how?"

"Last week," answered John, the footman. "But the worst is yet to be told."

"Great Heaven! what do you mean?"

"Murder has been committed. Theo Howard was murdered on the night of the robbery."

A shriek of agony came from the lips of Myra Ferry, and she fell into the arms of her father in a dead faint.

* * * * *

Early the next morning the inspector of police was seated at his desk writing busily, when a knock was heard at his door.

"A lady to see you, sir," said the servant, who ushered in a closely veiled young woman.

"Good-morning, miss," said the inspector, politely, a little curious as to the identity of his visitor.

"I have called to make inquiries concerning the robbery of the Fidelity Bank."

"Any information we may have regarding that unfortunate affair is at your disposal, except, of course, certain points that must be kept secret."

"All I wish," replied the lady, in the sweetest of tones, yet with absolute decision of utterance, "is to have a few minutes' conversation with the detective who was detailed upon the case. Is such a thing allowable?"

"Certainly. He is not engaged just now, and will doubtless be pleased to accommodate you."

"Newspaper descriptions are not always reliable, and as I wished to obtain the exact facts in the case, I thought it best to apply to you."

"You did right. I will now call Mr. Belton, the detective to whom you refer."

A few moments later the young lady found herself seated in a private office with a remarkable looking man.

The absence of a beard showed every lineament of his powerful countenance, and the stranger felt in a moment that he was a person who could be trusted.

"I wish to make some inquiries of you concerning the bank trouble of last week."

"I am at your service, miss."

"I only desire the circumstances attending the robbery."

"Very well, miss. That information I can give you in very few words. The robbery was committed somewhere between the hours of ten and twelve. It is supposed that young Howard—he was the cashier, you understand—was engaged in finishing up some accounts, and was last seen by the janitor something after nine. At half-past ten two men pounced upon the janitor while in the basement, gagged and bound him, then went up-stairs. A few minutes later the unfortunate servant could hear sounds of a struggle going on above him without being able to give a word of warning to the outside world as to the tragedy that was being acted in earnest within the four walls of the building. These sounds shortly ceased, and in a half hour he heard the retreating footsteps of the robbers."

"Is the janitor a man to be trusted?" interrupted the listener.

"Such seems to be the general opinion of those who know him. His countenance is likewise an excellent recommendation, being both honest and open. He could not have been an accomplice."

"Did no one else see Mr.—Mr. Howard on that evening?" in faltering tones.

"Yes, several passers-by testified to seeing him before the safe and in various parts of the front room; but the mystery of the robbery was increased when it was discovered the next morning that the cashier had disappeared, and notwithstanding the evident marks of a terrific struggle, the presence of

blood, and the confusion of the furniture in the office, it was believed that Howard had been in collusion with the burglars."

The fair young visitor seemed much moved by this statement, but Belton apparently paid no attention to the fact.

"That suspicion was dispelled, however, in the saddest possible manner, and the young man's character cleared by the proof that he died while defending the bank from loss."

Although the visitor's face was partially concealed by the veil, it could be easily seen that she was under the influence of a great grief. The detective courteously refrained from noticing anything unusual, and went on with his story.

"Two days afterward the body of a man was discovered in the opening of a sewer not two squares from the Fidelity Bank."

"Did you see it?" eagerly.

"I did."

"Was it—was it Mr. Howard's body?"

"It undoubtedly was."

"Did you know the young man?"

"By sight only. The proof of identity did not rest with me. Persons who were intimate with the gentleman were well satisfied that it was he."

"And yet I understood that his body was in a mutilated condition when found."

"So it was, the face being almost unrecognizable, but it bore the same clothes Mr. Howard wore that evening, and more than that, it carried one of the most indubitable proofs that could exist."

"Please explain," breathlessly.

"There was a scar on the back of the head of

such a peculiar shape that his friends at once recognized it."

"Then you are satisfied," with a weary sigh, "that the proof was clear and undoubted?"

"As far as human knowledge goes I would answer yes. Stranger things than these have happened, however, and another man may be occupying the grave intended for Theo Howard."

"Has any clew been found?"

Belton smiled mysteriously.

"I must now claim the privilege, miss, of refusing to answer your question, unless, of course, you can satisfy me as to the cause of your curiosity. It would not be politic in us to surrender any of our secrets to a stranger, and even if you were closely connected with the officials of the bank, we might find it inexpedient to give you the desired information."

The lady hesitated in agitation for a few moments, but apparently coming to a sudden determination, she threw aside her veil and stood revealed to the admiring gaze of the officer.

"I am Myra Ferry, daughter of Mr. Ferry, the president of the bank. It may seem a hasty as well as an imprudent step for me to come here, especially since there are other means of obtaining the information I have sought from you, but something has impelled me to act thus, a feeling that I shall make a discovery that could not be made without my aid."

"I can see nothing improper in your visit, Miss Ferry, particularly if you can give us any clew that will be of advantage. Often the faintest hint serves us the best."

"You will realize my motive in visiting you when

I tell you that I was engaged to marry Theo Howard."

The detective nodded.

"So I have been told."

"I wish, then, to satisfy myself that it was really his body that was found."

"Are you not satisfied?"

"No."

Belton started.

"What is the cause of your doubt?"

"I have no tangible reason for doubting; it is merely a feeling, or perhaps a suspicion."

The detective looked disgusted.

"Merely a whim, I should say. I was in hopes that you had some disclosure to make."

"Perhaps I have."

Belton gazed at her admiringly.

"I see you are possessed of not a little acumen, but don't you know the very fact of his being alive would throw suspicion upon him?"

"Possibly, but his being alive is the important thing to me now. His innocence can be established afterward."

"Then you have no doubt of his innocence, should he be alive at this moment?"

"Certainly not. Theo Howard was the soul of honor."

"I have found that he drank some."

"With his friends occasionally."

"Gambled, even."

Myra flushed.

"I am sorry to acknowledge that he did what many in his set do."

"A dangerous pastime for any young man who has charge of other people's money."

"I know it, yet he was innocent, for all that."

"You mean to insinuate that he has been the victim of foul play?"

"Exactly."

"Now we are getting at the root of the matter, Miss Ferry. Have you any suspicion as to the guilty party?"

"I have. Do you know Julian Stark?"

The detective smiled.

"He is the man, then?"

"He is. Previous to my departure for Europe, six months ago, I warned Theo Howard to beware of him. I have a strong suspicion that he is the guilty man."

"Most people would laugh at such a charge."

"And you smile."

"I certainly do. The idea is absurd."

"Yet you are a detective."

Belton colored.

"Of course one may be mistaken. You may be in a position to know something of Stark's history and character. I am speaking only from hearsay when I assert that your suspicion is an absurd one. He is widely respected. How do you know he has done anything criminal?"

"I don't know, for direct proof is wanting, yet my woman's instinct tells me he is guilty."

"Unfortunately, instinct doesn't go far in a court of justice."

"I am aware of that, but it is a guide that often leads to conviction or acquittal."

"Enlighten me in regard to the matter."

"My woman's wit tells me that he is an unprincipled man. He was Theo Howard's most intimate friend. The former is a suspicion, the latter a fact.

If the suspicion becomes a fact also, what would be your opinion?"

Belton smiled admiringly again.

"You have an ingenious way of coming to a conclusion, though I can't just yet see the connection between Stark's wickedness and the robbery of the bank. Now, tell me whether you have any more than a mere presentiment that Howard still lives."

"I have a test."

"A test?"

"Yes, and an infallible one."

CHAPTER II.

ON THE VERGE OF A SOLUTION.

Belton's countenance lighted.

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I had a reason."

"I shall soon begin to think you a most remarkable woman."

"I have no desire to be considered remarkable," answered Myra, with simple dignity; "so I am willing to enlighten you at once. I have led you on to talk, so that I might take an inventory of your character and abilities."

"Are you satisfied?"

Belton asked this in a somewhat piqued tone.

"I am. I felt I could trust you when I first looked upon your countenance, and now I believe you can do for me more than any other man, and I shall at once intrust to you the work of ferreting out what I believe to be a horrible crime, committed by one who stands high in society."

Belton simply inclined his head.

"Whether Theo Howard be dead or alive, I believe this man to be the criminal, and I feel certain you will prove him so. I spoke a moment ago of a test that would determine once for all whether or not there is a mystery connected with him who was my intended husband. One day he told me—in fact, he has mentioned it on various occasions—that in a spirit of fun he had had his initials tattooed on his left shoulder, so that, to use his own words, if he were lost it would be an easy matter for his friends to find him, little realizing how true and yet how sad a statement he was making," the poor girl concluded in a fit of sobbing.

"You mean to have this test applied?"

"I cannot rest until I am satisfied one way or the other. Did no one speak of the initials?"

"The matter was not mentioned."

"Then I shall depend on you to help me investigate it. You must go with me to the cemetery to-night."

Belton looked at her curiously.

"Oh, I am perfectly sane," she replied quickly, interpreting his look. "I have no fear in undertaking the affair, with you as my protector, but it must be conducted secretly and to-night. Will you aid me?"

"I shall, most heartily. Be ready at nine o'clock to make the journey, and you will find a cab in waiting for you at the corner. Enter it without hesitation, and trust to the future for your after guidance."

That evening Myra gave her parents a plausible excuse for retiring early, and just as the clock was striking the hour of nine, she quietly stepped from a side door, and walked quickly to the corner,

where, as the detective had told her, she espied a cab apparently waiting for some one.

As she arrived at the curbstone a man, heavily bearded, alighted from the seat occupied by the driver, and without a word opened the door of the cab.

Myra entered fearlessly, for there was nothing of the coward about her, and besides she had trusted Belton implicitly.

In passing the next corner a stranger stepped from the pavement, and swung himself up beside the driver. Till this time not a word had passed between Myra and her companion, but as the girl noticed this sudden accession to the party without a sign of the presence of the detective she became somewhat alarmed.

"Where is Mr. Belton?" she finally inquired.

"Having some particular business on hand, he sent me in his stead."

"He has something more important than this, then?" asked the poor girl, ready to cry with disappointment.

"Well, he didn't say so, but seeing that he isn't here to-night, I should imagine that such was the case."

"I am sorry that Mr. Belton has so little regard for his word," said Myra, in quiet but decided tones. "I shall be greatly obliged if you will stop the cab and let me out, sir."

"Couldn't think of it, miss," said the other, insolently. "Such good-looking damsels as you don't escape so easily."

"If you refuse to allow me to alight, I shall call for help," was the quiet reply, as she prepared to carry out her threat.

"In that case," said her companion, rather hastily, "I shall be obliged to show my hand," and with a quick motion of that member, he tore the huge beard away, thereby revealing the features of Belton, the detective.

Myra sank back into her seat with flushed cheeks.

"I must now return a compliment you paid me, by saying that you are a most remarkable man," she said, with mingled chagrin and admiration.

"Not remarkable, simply expert. It's a part of our business, Miss Ferry, to assume disguises that our best friends cannot penetrate, so you needn't feel put out because you could not detect an almost perfect stranger. I really believe you'd make a first-class detective yourself."

"Do you know what was in my mind," remarked the girl, with a smile, forgetful of her sad errand for the moment; "if I had not secured you to-day, I should have made an attempt to ferret out the mystery myself."

"The only imprudent thing I have heard you utter yet," replied Belton, warmly. "A daintily nurtured woman like yourself, in fact, a woman of any kind or extraction, would fare but badly, at the best, in such a role. Better drop the whole affair than engage in it alone."

The rest of the drive was made in comparative silence, both busy with their thoughts, Myra meditating upon the sad bereavement that had made this journey necessary, and Belton revolving the great possibilities that would arise in case the girl's suspicions should prove to be correct.

At last the cab stopped, and the detective, after assisting Myra to alight, addressed a few words to the cabman, who immediately drove off.

The man who had ridden beside the driver stood near, and when Belton offered his arm to Myra and started off, the stranger followed at such a distance as would give no indication that he formed one of the party.

"Is this the cemetery?" asked Myra, with a shudder, as she glanced at the wall beside them.

"Yes. We will soon reach a place free from observation, where we can make an entrance. In the meantime, keep up your courage, and fear nothing."

A few minutes later they were all inside the inclosure unseen, as they thought, by any one. A short walk in the darkness brought them to a mound of fresh earth, and here they paused.

"Courage!" whispered Belton, as Myra began to tremble and sob violently. "This terrible suspense will soon be over. Jones, let me have the shovel."

The silent stranger produced a pick and a shovel from the bundle he carried, and the pair at once fell to work, digging and shoveling rapidly, yet noiselessly, while Myra stood by stifling her grief as best she could.

Down deeper they went, every stroke they made jarring heavily upon her wrought-up nerves.

At last the sudden, dull sound showed that they had reached the abode of the dead, and Myra gave utterance to a cry of pain as she realized she was on the verge of a solution to the mystery that had been harassing her since the return from Europe.

"Heaven support me!" she murmured, in pitiable agony, turning her face to the sky.

A few more shovelfuls, and the workmen, producing ropes, soon had the coffin raised to the surface of the ground.

Expeditionously the cover was removed, and the dead body exposed in all its hideous ghastliness.

Belton now beckoned the trembling girl to approach, and as she stood beside the coffin, the rays of the dark lantern fell upon the face of the dead.

Myra drew back in horror as she beheld the mutilated, unrecognizable countenance.

"This is an awful ordeal," murmured Belton, "but a very necessary one. Remember, it was your wish; therefore be courageous."

By a deft movement the body was turned on its side. A quick flash of a knife, and the clothing about the left shoulder was cut away, leaving the bare flesh exposed.

The detective turned aside the rays of his lantern for a moment.

"Once more, Miss Ferry, I beseech you, calm yourself, and prepare for even a disappointment, should it occur."

"I will be calm," said Myra, though trembling in every limb.

"Good! Now, Jones, turn the body over a little more."

The next moment, as the light again fell upon the corpse, with a cry of agony that went to both men's hearts, Myra fell backward in a dead faint.

There in bold outlines stood the initials "T. H!"

CHAPTER III.

THE DETECTIVE RECEIVES A LETTER.

"The young lady takes it hard," remarked Jones, as Belton busied himself in resuscitating Myra.

"Yes, it has been a hard blow on her. She got the

idea into her head that the wrong man was in this grave, and it so grew upon her that she wouldn't believe in anything else. I might as well say that she almost impressed me with the same belief; anyhow, she influenced me sufficiently to make an investigation, and I wouldn't have been at all surprised had the affair turned out as she expected."

"She ought to be convinced by this time," said Jones, dryly, with an utter disbelief in such stuff as instinct. In his hard knocks against the world he had found common sense the best guide for man or woman.

"The proof was too strong for the poor girl," replied Belton, in pitying tones. "We must not be so hard on her, for she has suffered too much already. Here, hold her head while I place this coat under it, then let her lie until she recovers consciousness. We must get the body out of her sight just as soon as possible."

As Belton began to readjust the corpse, he glanced carelessly again at the fatal initials, but something in their appearance caught his eye.

"Hold a moment until I examine this tattooing, Jones," he said, holding the light so that he could get the best view of it.

"Doesn't look like tattooing at all," said Jones, who had also come closer.

"You're right, Bill; but I'll go further, and say that it isn't tattooing; nothing more or less than paint."

"Correct you are, partner," said Bill. "Wasn't it a lucky last look you give the corpus? Darned if I won't believe in instinct hereafter, when such a condemned pretty girl says so."

"But we must not make any mistake," said Bel-

ton, hurriedly. "It would never do to raise hope in her breast again without we are absolutely certain that she was correct in her surmise."

"Well, didn't she say the initials were tattooed?"

"Yes."

"And these ain't."

"It looks so, but we must make certain. Have you any turpentine about you?"

"My luck exactly. Just one chance in a million, but I got that chance, and the turpentine, too. Bought it this afternoon for croup in the family, and, like the lunny I am, left it in my pocket. Here it is."

Belton, with more trepidation than he would have been willing to confess, applied a few drops of the liquid to the supposed tattooing, and, as he expected, a little rubbing dissolved the letters, leaving the clean flesh underneath.

"By George!" cried Bill, with enthusiasm, "that girl is a brick, and no mistake. Wouldn't make a bad stagger at the detective business herself, would she?"

"We must think of something else now. Every moment spent here increases our chances of detection. Let us get through with this business and depart."

Myra by this time gave signs of returning consciousness, and was shortly able to stand on her feet.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she moaned, in grief. "Now that I know he is dead, how shall I pass the remainder of my life? I had so built upon his being alive that I know this terrible blow will kill me."

"Don't be despondent, Miss Ferry. Things may turn out better than you imagine."

"How can they when I know that poor Theo is dead," said the girl, drearily.

"But you don't know that for a certainty."

"What do you mean?" she cried, seizing him by the arm in her sudden excitement. "Is this horrible scene I have just witnessed a dream?"

"It is unfortunately no dream, Miss Ferry; but while you were unconscious we made a discovery."

"Oh, tell me what it is."

"I must first ask you a question."

"A dozen, but be quick."

"Are you satisfied that the initials were made by means of tattooing?"

"Certainly. There is no doubt on that point. Theo described the operation so well that I remember all the circumstances distinctly."

"This tattooing, so-called, was done with paint."

"What! Am I dreaming?" cried Myra, wildly.

"No, you are as wide awake as you ever were in your life. Behold for yourself. I have removed one of the letters with turpentine; now watch the other go."

Myra calmed herself sufficiently to observe the process, and at the end she knelt in thanks to Heaven for the discovery.

"Now," she remarked, in quiet dignity, "now that we have solved one problem, and that the most important before us, I feel strong enough for any trial. Any sacrifice you may call upon me to make will be met most willingly."

"We hope that your sacrifices will be few, indeed, Miss Ferry," said Belton, gently; "but we shall be glad to enroll you as an ally, and feel certain that you can aid us materially. Now, Jones, let us finish our work and be gone."

A very few minutes sufficed to place the grave in the same order as that in which they found it, and when this was done Bill picked up his bundle preparatory to starting.

At that moment the absolute stillness of the night was broken by the loud report of a pistol, and the lantern that the detective held was shattered into a hundred pieces.

Myra, barely repressing a scream, clung to her companion, who was glad to find herself uninjured, while Bill dropped his bundle and gave chase to the miscreant whose footsteps could be heard in hasty retreat.

A few minutes later he returned out of breath, and not a little chagrined.

"That feller, whoever he is, must have long legs. He's a sprinter, anyhow, for he left me far enough behind, and I'm no slouch, either," and the disappointed fellow went on grumbling in an undertone until they had once more reached the highway, where they were glad to find the cab in waiting for them.

"It is evident," said Belton, as they were again in motion, "that our journey as well as its object has been discovered by a foe who wished to do away with one or more of us. Now the question is, who is the man?"

"The answer is plain to my mind," said Myra, calmly. "Stark, and no other, is at the head of this gigantic conspiracy."

"You were so correct in one suspicion that I am now inclined to agree with you in this; consequently Stark will be shadowed from this time forth, and under the constant surveillance of a shrewd detective, he will be an exceedingly remarkable man

if he fails to betray himself in the long run. To some it would seem the height of absurdity to subject such a respectable man to espionage; it would have seemed so to me twenty-four hours ago, but it shall be done. No stone shall be left unturned to ferret out the mystery, made doubly mysterious by to-night's discovery. And that brings to mind the question of Howard's whereabouts. It will be our duty also to look after every possible clew that will give us any indication of his fate."

"I have no doubt that your surveillance of Stark will put you on the track of poor Theo."

"It certainly will should that person be the guilty party."

"Do you suppose I was recognized?"

"It is possible, though you were so closely veiled that, unless you were shadowed from home, the chances are greatly in your favor. At all events, we must be careful. I will let you out some distance from your home, and you can reach the house in a roundabout way so as to throw off any suspicion. In the meantime, be exceedingly cautious in all your actions. Don't leave the house except with an escort, for if your enemies—I take it that Mr. Howard's enemies are your enemies—were to have their suspicions aroused concerning you, they would not hesitate to remove you from their path. Above all, I wish you to observe one thing."

"What is that?"

"I am afraid you will find this the hardest of all to do, but I have such faith in your ability and good sense that I am sure you will be highly successful in the role I am about to assign you."

"You may be sure I will undertake it if you think it will help on with the good work."

"It will certainly prove the most profitable occupation you have ever undertaken. Now, listen: How have you been accustomed to treat Stark during his calls upon you?"

"As a passing acquaintance merely."

"Have you ever shown your dislike to him?"

"I have always tried to conceal it as much as possible, but I never succeeded in being what I would call cordial toward him."

"Then, are you actress enough to maintain the same attitude toward him, making it a trifle warmer if anything, and allow him to make you his confidante if he is inclined to do so?"

"I think I am," Myra replied, with a smile. "I could do anything not dishonorable in such a cause."

"By not rejecting his advances, if he has any to make, you will probably discover if he has any motive outside of the robbery and the disappearance of Theo Howard. In the meantime, I shall be in constant communication with you, so that immediate advantage can be taken of any misstep he may make."

Belton now stopped the coach, and assisted Myra to alight, keeping up a sharp lookout for a shadow, but as nothing suspicious was seen he bade her good-night, feeling assured that he had good grounds for supposing that the enemy had not as yet made much progress in divining his plans.

"But," thought he to himself as he made his way to the office of his superior, "how is it to be regarding this young man Howard? His disappearance is strange, to say the least; but I didn't dare to intimate such a thing, though whatever I might say to Miss Ferry in that respect would not shake her faith in him a particle. She isn't one of that kind, who,

like weathercocks, are liable to change off in their opinions at the first little puff of evidence that may come flying around. She'll believe in his guilt when she sees it with her own eyes; but I am one who hopes and believes that she will never see it. The man who wins the love of such a woman as Myra Ferry certainly must be made of sterling stuff. The fact that she has undergone so much, and is likely to endure many an untold trial for him yet, speaks loudly in his favor."

A few minutes later the detective was closeted with his chief, to whom the strange events of the evening were related.

"By the way," remarked the inspector in parting, "a letter was left here for you a short time ago, with orders to be delivered to you straightway upon your return. Here it is."

Belton leisurely tore open the envelope, but he became all attention when he saw the purport of the missive.

"If detective Belton would know something concerning the Fidelity Bank robbery he will come to Sam's place to-night at twelve o'clock. He must be alone, otherwise he will pursue a fruitless quest. The writer will give the information mentioned for a price, the details to be agreed upon to-night. The fear of being discovered by the criminals and punished has led the writer to take this step instead of going directly to headquarters with what he knows. Should you decide to come, ask for room number three.

BOB YOUNGER."

"Hello!" remarked Belton, with a loud whistle. "Is this a bluff or not? That dare-devil is surely not in town. Oh, no! it must be a stiff he is giving me, for he can't imagine I'd go unprepared to meet such a desperado. At all events, the enemy are showing

their hand mighty quick in the game. They evidently mean business, and as I am on the same tack, I suppose there will be fun before another sun. Well, here's luck to you, Mr. Younger. I'll see you later, and may the best man win."

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUEEN.

It now becomes necessary for us to go backward for a time in order to become acquainted with the events of the preceding six months.

One evening Theo Howard was seated in his room after his day's work was done, thinking with longing of the happy period when his beloved Myra should return.

Theo was comparatively alone in the world, having no near relatives, having none of any kind so far as he knew.

Time, therefore, hung heavily on his hands, and it was small wonder that he sought the company of such men as Julian Stark.

Even as he sat and meditated, an authoritative knock was heard at the door, and in answer to his summons the visitor entered.

Theo sprang to his feet with an eagerness that showed how much he detested loneliness.

"Hello, Julian. I'm delighted to see you. Was just beginning to have a dose of the blue devils when your knock came like a panacea as it is for all ills."

"I knew you would be lonesome this evening, so I concluded to drop around and amuse you."

A firm chin and lower jaw, a droop of the mouth,

with the faintest suggestion, to the close observer, of refined cruelty in its handsome contour, an athletic and graceful form, pleasing features, dark hair, and eyes that varied in expression from moment to moment; such was the appearance of Julian Stark, a man popular among women and his fellows, whom everybody knew and was delighted to know, yet knew not.

"Are you acquainted with Julian Stark?"

"Certainly. Quite an honor, I assure you."

"What is his business?"

"He's a lawyer, I believe."

"Successful?"

"He certainly seems to be. How could he help it since he is so popular?"

"Whence came he?"

"Don't know."

"What are his antecedents?"

"Don't know."

"What cases has he figured in?"

"Don't know."

"He seems to have plenty of money."

"Yes."

"Where does he obtain it?"

"Don't know; suppose from his practice."

Further than this no one seemed able to get, and thus Stark and Stark's life formed a mystery without people knowing or caring that such was the case.

"What's on the programme to-night, Theo?"

"I intended to pass the evening here, and perhaps indite a letter after a while to Miss Ferry."

"But I guess you will find that moping about the house is somewhat too slow an amusement, now

that you have found such excellent company, eh?" with a familiar slap on the shoulder.

"All but the letter," was the loyal reply. "If you wish me to join you, I must first be allowed to attend to my correspondence."

"All right; I'll smoke in the meantime."

A half hour later Theo was ready.

"Now, what shall we do?" he asked.

"Opera first; afterward we shall spend the evening with a friend."

"Some one I know?"

A shake of the head.

"I don't often allow persons to meet this reassured acquaintance of mine, but I'll make an exception in your case."

When the opera was over Julian hailed a cab, and in it the two friends were driven up town.

They finally alighted before a modest but home-like dwelling. A well dressed servant answered their knock and ushered them into a luxurious apartment.

Ten minutes later a vision of loveliness entered the room.

Theo was certain that he had never yet seen so beautiful a creature as this woman was.

She was certainly not more than twenty-five years of age. Magnificently proportioned, elegantly yet tastefully dressed, this wonderfully handsome woman for the time drove all thoughts of Myra out of Theo's head.

He was overcome by her beauty.

"Here is my friend," said Stark, thoroughly enjoying Theo's look of admiration. "Behold and adore. Miss Trainer, allow me the pleasure of pre-

senting to you a young man whom I consider my most intimate friend, Mr. Howard.

"Do you know what I call Miss Trainer?" he asked, a moment later.

"I have no doubt," said Theo, gallantly, "that it must be a most appropriate and happy appellation."

"You are right; I call her Queen; Queenie, for short," was the complacent reply.

"I am sure she deserves it if any woman ever did," and just then the pure, lovely face of Myra floated between him and the rich beauty opposite.

His frame shook for a moment with a presentiment of coming evil, and the thought that he should at once flee from all temptation possessed his soul; but a look into that dark, fascinating countenance dispelled the warning. The face of his betrothed faded into darkness, and once more he had forgotten.

"How complimentary gentlemen can be when they bend themselves to the task," said the Queen, with a gay smile.

"No task, I assure you," declared Stark, lazily. "It's a pleasure we owe to every lovely woman to tell her she is lovely. How else is she to know the truth?"

"No mirrors, I suppose?"

"Mirrors were not made to admire one's self in," remarked Julian, "only to see how best to adorn. But now, Queenie, as our time is limited, we shall be obliged to ask you for the best specimen of your vocal powers, after which we will beg the privilege of having you join us in a game of cards."

With a pleasant smile Miss Trainer went to the piano, and after sweeping lightly over the keys, she

began to sing in rich and cultivated tones one of the simple old songs Theo loved so well to hear.

"Bravo!" cried Julian, clapping his hands gayly; "I never heard you sing better," while Theo sat in silent admiration of the artist and the song.

After a few more selections the Queen, as we shall sometimes call her, arose from the instrument, and, in answer to a significant look from Stark, said, with a charming smile:

"Now, you are doubtless ready for the cards, but it must not be merely a cold game. You will certainly allow me to enliven it with refreshments."

"Your presence will certainly atone for the absence of anything else. Give us that and we will be more than content," exclaimed Theo, oblivious, for the time, of his loyalty to the only girl he had ever loved.

"I am opposed to drinking wine as a general thing," supplemented Stark, gravely; "while in itself it may be innocent enough, its effect is bad on weak natures."

"A drive at me," cried Theo; "that's his style, Miss Trainer, but I can show him that my nature is not so weak as he takes it to be. Let us have the wine, if you please."

"Certainly; it is mild, and will hurt no one."

A moment later a waiter entered the room with wine and other refreshments, which the party were soon discussing along with the game; Stark, however, in accordance with his custom, partaking very sparingly.

Under the siren's lead Theo drank long and deeply.

It seemed for the time that he was bewitched by

the beauty who threw such a glamour over him and such thrilling glances into his eyes.

How he got home he knew not, but through the whole evening he had the unpleasant consciousness of hearing Stark urge him to drink no more, a fact which, as its instigator intended, produced the effect of having him drink still more deeply, until we are obliged to confess he had to be assisted home.

"What do you think of him?" asked Stark, covertly, before leaving. "Will he make a victim?"

"It would seem so," remarked the Queen, with an uneasy laugh. "The only thing that troubles me is, what will be done in case there are two victims?"

Stark looked at her sharply.

"See here, Queenie, this is a business matter. Don't play the fool and spoil our chances of making a fortune."

"Why should I divide it with you since I can have a chance of winning it all by winning him?"

"All right," carelessly, "but don't forget that little affair with Windom last year, in which the poor devil lost his life."

CHAPTER V.

JULIAN STARK'S STORY.

"Howard," said Stark, one evening, as he lounged into Theo's room, "do you want to get rich in a month's time?"

"I wouldn't object," answered the other, with a careless laugh, "so the means were legitimate. Legitimate fortunes, however, are seldom made in a month."

Stark shrugged his shoulders.

"Thousands of them are made and lost every day, my boy, and that, too, in as legitimate a way as you please. It only requires a little nerve and good common sense. By the way, how much are you worth?" this somewhat curiously.

Theo looked uneasily at the floor.

"Not quite so much as I was a month ago."

"Oh, ho! been gambling and drinking a little, I see. How much has the fair Queen won from you, old fellow?"

"Oh, not a great deal," said Theo, trying to look unconcerned.

"Better fess up, take an inventory of your losses, and then cut her acquaintance. Handling edged tools is a dangerous occupation, and you'll find Miss Trainer possessed of as keen an edge as any woman you ever met."

"Why, then, did you introduce me to her?"

"Simply because I believed you capable of taking care of yourself, and because I thought you needed amusement in Miss Ferry's absence; I didn't expect that you would squander your money and go mooning over any such woman as the Queen."

"I am not so badly struck as you imagine," said Theo, stiffly.

"Perhaps not, but badly enough not to wish your intended bride to know anything about your escapade."

Howard reflected a moment.

"That's so," he said, after awhile. "You're about right, Stark; I guess I'll go there no more. While I've been loyal enough to Myra in my heart, I can see how plainly my actions have spoken in the other direction. The Queen and I shall be strangers hereafter."

"Never do," said Stark. "See here, Howard, you're not sharp. If you wouldn't go back any more, the girl would give you an endless amount of trouble—a regular blowing up, as it were. All your friends from A to Izzard would know in short order that you had been very sweet on a questionable character, and you know what that would mean to you. I've a better plan. Go back and find some means of quarreling with her, and if you can induce her to get angry enough, she'll bounce you and say nothing about it. I'll leave the means to yourself."

Theo became silent again.

The enormity of his conduct became apparent to him, and during the few moments he passed in thought he made a resolution that from henceforth he would act the man.

"What would faithful Myra think were she to know what has been going on in her absence? What would she feel were she to discover that I have proven not only unfaithful, but wholly unworthy of her? No! This is my last escapade, and Myra shall be informed of what I have done on her return."

"Well," remarked Stark, lazily, "have you figured up your late losses? You seem to be in a deep study of some kind."

"Yes, I have been footing up my losses in a moral point of view, because I now regard them the most important. The other I have not yet considered in their full details, but most of my surplus at the bank is gone, and that is about all I have to depend upon."

"Then, I take it, you are financially embarrassed."

"That's about it. True, I have some bank stock, but not very much. You must remember that I rose from a very small beginning."

"You would rather that Miss Ferry should know nothing of your losses."

"Certainly; it would not add any to her peace of mind."

"Then we should at once set about repairing your fortunes, provided," with a smile, "that it can be done in a legitimate way."

"The best way I know of is to go to work as I have done all my life, and regain my former financial standing by proper attention to business."

"Slow work; will never do. You want a home, a luxurious one at that, for your bride, and must not therefore think of such a thing as a humble cottage, and all that sort of nonsense. Now," drawing his chair closer and speaking in low tones, as if fearful of being overheard, "I have a scheme on hand which promises, nay, is certain of returning a profit sufficient to make you as well as myself almost millionaires. That I have not even breathed it to any one you may be sure from this fact that I have not until this moment mentioned it to my best friend. I will reveal it to you only on condition that you keep it secret."

"Of course you have my promise," said Theo, becoming interested.

"I have thought out every detail of my plan, and am absolutely certain of its success, for I have the last cent of my own money ready to turn into it.

"This, in short, is the scheme: Two years ago I was prospecting in the West, and stumbled upon a claim then occupied by a shiftless miner, who made a living by picking up what nuggets he could find,

and by digging here and there as humor or necessity seized him.

"He would have killed me had I not been as powerful as himself, and better armed; for it seems that he had been working the claim on the quiet, and I had been the first to discover its whereabouts. It was a wild enough place, and I was heartily glad to get out of it.

"Before leaving, however, I made him an offer of ten thousand dollars for the mine, but he laughed at me, and said nothing less than twenty-five thousand dollars would buy it.

"A few days later I came back with an expert while the owner of the claim was off on one of his periodical sprees, and made a thorough examination, pretending, of course, in order to blind my companion, that the property was mine.

"The report was a most favorable one, and the expert congratulated me on my good luck to be the possessor of such a bonanza. I once more met the miner, and increased my offer to fifteen thousand dollars, though then I had not so many cents in all the world, but I was answered with another laugh of derision.

"Knowing, of course, the impossibility of raising the money in that locality, I left the country in disgust, but could never get the idea out of my head that I should be the possessor of that mine and its unknown treasures of gold.

"And now comes the strange part of the story. Three days ago I ran against a stranger on the streets, wearing the looks and the costume of a wild Western hybrid, and who do you think the fellow was?"

"Your miner friend, doubtless."

"Exactly so; the same thriftless fellow, ragged and dirty, without a cent to buy him food or lodging. I recognized him at once, and provided for him to the best of my ability. Said he in return: 'Stark, you've acted the white man toward me, and I'll do the square thing by you. You shall have that mine for fifteen thousand, and I wouldn't take less than my original price from anybody else. I got tired working it myself, and have hunted you up to strike a dicker with you.'

"To make a long story short, I looked the ground over very carefully, and came to the conclusion that it is the best investment I have ever had anything to do with; but I can raise only ten thousand dollars. Can you supply the other five?"

"I have about five thousand dollars," replied Theo, thoughtfully, "but I am not fully satisfied as to the safety of confiding so much in a stranger's word."

It is not our purpose to detail the various strong lights in which Stark placed his arguments before the young cashier. It is but necessary to state that he appealed to his pride in providing the best possible home for his future wife; his duty to do the best for himself; the absolute certainty of disposing of the property, in case they should decide not to work it themselves, for many times its cost; and a thousand other alluring pictures of what could be done with the fortune to be secured with so little trouble.

When Julian Stark parted from Theo that night he had secured the latter's promise to enter into the venture with him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE QUEEN AND THEO.

Theo Howard sat in his room wrapped in the thoughts that crowded upon him.

"The die is cast," he meditated. "What I am about to do probably never can be undone, but at least I go into the future and out into the world with my eyes open. Nevertheless, I do not feel easy or even safe in taking this step. Perhaps this may be owing to the fact that the happiness of being once more with Myra will be necessarily postponed, though I hope, as Julian thinks also, that we shall not be absent more than a month. Then good-bye to poverty, and welcome to fortune and all the enjoyment it will bring. One thing, however, affords me more satisfaction than all the wealth in the world could possibly create, and that is the fact of my breaking off with Miss Trainer. For once I have disregarded Stark's advice, and followed the promptings of my conscience. I have not seen her since that night, and I hope that my eyes will never rest upon her fatal likeness again."

At that moment a ring was heard at the door, and before Theo could bid the visitor enter, a veiled woman stepped across the threshold and paused before him.

Something in the graceful form seemed very familiar, and the young man was not greatly surprised when the lineaments of the Queen were revealed by the casting aside of the veil.

There stood Irene Trainer, a flush in her perfect face and a look of reproach in her eye.

Theo colored for a moment at the awkwardness of the meeting, but his manhood at once came to the rescue.

"An unexpected pleasure, Miss Trainer," he said, as coolly as the circumstances would permit.

"Oh, it is a pleasure, then, is it?" she said, with a dangerous flash of her eye. "I am so glad to hear it spoken with such evident feeling; otherwise I should infer that you have tried to avoid me for the past month."

"I have not tried to avoid you; I have simply been keeping to myself and attending to my affairs which had gotten very much out of order."

"You have suddenly gotten above visiting me?"

"I don't look at it in that light. Indeed, my doings for the past few months have been such as to lower myself at least in my own estimation. The fact is, I have been taking an inventory of my finances, and have come to the conclusion that visiting your establishment, pleasant as it may be, is a somewhat extravagant mode of amusing one's self. You have almost bankrupted me. The costly wines you have set forth, and the costlier play that I have allowed myself to indulge in have been my downfall."

"Is that all?"

"It is certainly enough."

The Queen gave a sigh of relief.

"I was afraid you had taken a fancy to another face."

"I? Oh, no! my fancy has never wavered in the least."

"Can't I induce you to come back and be friendly as of old?" with a pleading look.

"I have no desire to be at enmity with you, but I cannot hereafter visit you."

"Has Julian Stark been poisoning your mind against me?" angrily.

"Not at all. If I had followed his advice I would yet be enrolled in your train."

"Then why not follow his advice?" asked the beautiful girl, pleadingly.

Theo looked at her earnestly for a moment, wondering how it was possible that vice had ever secured a foothold in the soul that occupied such a perfect form and was endowed with such brilliant accomplishments. Was it any wonder that she had almost succeeded in insnaring him as she had done many a young man before?

"See," said she, kneeling at his feet, "I implore you to be my friend. I am willing to make any sacrifice for your sake, if you will but give me a little of your love," the voice sinking lower in shame at the confession.

"Rise!" said Theo, sternly, as he compelled her to assume her original position; but for answer the apparently infatuated woman threw her arms about his neck, and clung to him with all the intensity of unrequited love.

Her ruse would have been successful with many a man of a trifle less determination, for the soft tones of her perfectly modulated voice, the delicate perfume that hovered about her, the confession she was making, all were bewildering enough to him who had long since irrevocably made up his mind to the course he should for the sake of duty, loyalty, and manhood pursue.

Therefore he quietly but no less firmly removed her arms, and in icy tones remarked:

"You forget yourself, Miss Trainer. Please be seated."

The Queen sank into the nearest chair, panting for breath, but a dangerous gleam had suddenly made its appearance in her glowing orbs.

"Ha! ha! ha! what a scene, and what a virtuous young man!"

"Alas, no! but a young man who has realized the error of his way, and is determined to profit thereby."

"Then you have made up your mind to cast me off?"

"Not at all. I have never considered myself your lover."

"But I have!" she cried, fiercely, "and I will not be jilted. Make any attempt of the kind at your peril!"

Theo's lip turned in scorn.

"There is the door," he said, quietly. "I have had enough of such a scene; therefore be kind enough to leave the house."

It would be difficult to depict the change that took place in her mobile countenance, but it suddenly became convulsed with a spasm of anger, hate, jealousy, and fury, such as Theo had never yet seen in a human face.

"You scorn me! You dismiss me as you would a loathsome cur, unfit to occupy the same room, to breath the same air as your sainted self. Very well; be it so, but remember that our accounts are yet open, and that they are now in your favor; but the balancing will come in due time. Until then, good-bye and pleasant dreams!"

The next moment she had passed through the door out into the night.

"What a vixen she is!" Theo commented. "She looked furious enough to have murdered me,

though she is sorry already that she acted so outrageously. What a confounded pretty compound of all the vices, too; but I am decidedly glad to be rid of her at last."

In the meantime Irene Trainer was hurrying along the street, and anathematizing, in her blind fashion, Theo and all his connections, and plotting a fit return for what she called his faithlessness.

As she was crossing a dark alley she almost ran against the figure of a man walking in the opposite direction, and as the latter muttered a hasty apology she lost sight of her anger sufficiently to recognize the tones as belonging to Stark.

"Oh, it is you, is it?" she said, sharply. "Going to see your dupe, I suppose?"

"Hello, my fair sovereign," after assuring himself by a searching glance that he was not being observed. "What brings the fair Queen to this locality to-night?"

"The city is free to me, is it not?"

"As long as you conduct yourself properly, but what has happened, Queenie? Your digestion seems to be out of order."

"Don't be a fool, Julian Stark. This is no laughing matter."

"Indeed! but pray do not be so boisterous in tone; some curious passer-by might catch the drift of your words, and be attracted hither."

"Yes, and discover the saintly Stark in colloquy with a suspicious character."

"Oh, no; not so bad as that. You are generally considered a very respectable woman, with a somewhat unusual proclivity toward liveliness of manner."

"Thank you. I should judge, however, that if

you could only be seen here, it would prove quite an eye-opener to certain persons."

"An unnecessary one, at all events; and I guess you are just as much interested in upholding the good name of the saintly Stark, as you call him, as the saintly Stark himself. You must have been calling on our mutual friend to-night."

"I have."

"Cold reception, doubtless, judging from the general frigidity of the atmosphere about you."

"You are right; he has cast me off altogether."

Stark whistled.

"Bad as that? Well, I was afraid he would, and advised him to let you go gradually; but it seems that he wouldn't have anything except an abrupt termination to an acquaintance that has been a most profitable one to you, and so acted on his own advice."

"I thought you had put him up to it. If you had, I intended to make it warm for you."

"Don't think of such a thing in this weather, my dear girl; it's too fatiguing. Besides, never lose sight of the fact that I hold you in the hollow of my hand. A single misstep, and the Queen is queen no more."

Irene laughed contemptuously.

"I'm too old a bird to be scared by such idle threats."

"Idle threats! Think of poor Windom, who lost his life so mysteriously last year, and then say idle threats."

"I wonder if the good people of Minneapolis have ever heard of the name of Bob Younger?" said the girl, almost irrelevantly, as she drew the light shawl a little more closely about her form.

"Doubtless," laughed Stark, carelessly. "Such a ruffian and cut-throat couldn't live long so near us without making a more or less unsavory reputation beyond his own State."

"How much do you think the good officials of this city would be willing to give just to know where to lay hands on him? and then how much do you suppose his excellent friends, the officers of our neighboring State, would be delighted to add to this amount simply for the privilege of cultivating his acquaintance at short range?"

"That thought has really never interested me, but I have no doubt it would prove a munificent reward."

"Then I guess we are quits for the present. Good-night!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE BANK ROBBERY.

"Mr. Daniels," said Theo Howard, as one of the most prominent and wealthy directors of the bank came in on a matter of business, "I wish to speak to you before you go."

"Certainly, Mr. Howard; I shall be at leisure in a moment."

Five minutes later the two were in the cashier's private office.

"Mr. Daniels," began Theo, "I have decided on making a change."

"What!" cried the other, in great surprise, and with no little chagrin depicted in his countenance. "You are not going to leave us?"

"Yes, I am about to go into a venture on my own account."

"Tut, tut, man! we cannot afford to let you go; and let me say I am persuaded that you cannot afford to leave us."

"I would not think of breaking my connection with an institution that has been the making of me, unless I believed I would be bettering myself; but I must say that it is with the keenest regret that I have decided to leave the employ of this fine old business house."

"Going to leave the city?"

"Yes. I would be glad to tell you everything concerning my venture, Mr. Daniels, but as it is a partnership and to a certain extent its success depends upon the secrecy with which it is conducted, I do not feel at liberty to say more."

"When do you leave?"

"Next week."

"And your decision is final?"

"Yes."

"See here, Howard. You are about to embark in something more or less risky, for nothing to a business man is an absolute certainty. You may succeed in this matter; you may lose every cent. In the latter case what becomes of you, your prospects, your hopes? Now, your position here is a certainty so far as human foresight is able to divine."

"That is true enough, but you know that if one ventures nothing, one wins nothing."

"Yes," somewhat testily, "but you must use a little common sense in your ventures. I haven't the faintest idea what this freak of yours is, but why don't you hold on to your position here until you are satisfied that your move in the other direction is to be a success? In other words, get a substitute for cashier, or simply obtain leave of absence for a

month, or for whatever time you may think it necessary."

Theo was silent for a moment.

"I believe that will be the better plan," he said at last.

"Undoubtedly, so we will consider the matter settled," and Mr. Daniels, with a smile of satisfaction that he had succeeded in retaining an employe whose services were so valuable, left the bank in the loveliest humor imaginable.

"Hayes," said Theo, to the janitor, at the close of banking hours, "I expect to be back after supper, as I have a little work to do before to-morrow."

"Very well, sir," was the reply. "I shall have things in shape for you."

About eight o'clock the side door of the bank was opened, and Hayes, who was engaged in sweeping out the hall, observed the figure of Howard enter.

With a nod of salutation the cashier passed on into his office, carelessly whistling a popular air, and for an hour the janitor heard him moving about from one part of the bank to another, still humming and whisting over his work.

"The cashier's sartinly in a good humor the night," muttered Hayes, as he descended into the basement. "Begorra, I don't doubt in the laste he's had a letter from his swateheart. That's fwhat brings thim to the scratch ivery toime. Och, but he's a good one, that same man, and he desarves the jewel he's goin' to get. If I had me dimmyjohn here I'd drink swate luck to both. Hist! fwhat the divil's that?" he added, in alarm, as he heard a slight noise in the darkness. "Aither ghosts or rats, and rats I've niver seen in this buildin'. Onyhow, here's a match, and we'll see if it's ghosts. Oh!"

With a groan the janitor sank unconscious upon the floor.

A sandbag had descended upon his head just as he was about to light the match, and rendered him harmless for the time.

When consciousness returned, the unlucky Irishman found himself blindfolded and tied hand and foot, so that either sight or movement was an utter impossibility.

And thus, during the slow watches of the night, he was forced to lie in that position, fearful every moment of the return of the burglar or burglars, and racked with rheumatic pains.

His thoughts, however, could not be bound, and it is almost needless to say that his doleful utterances would have made a most interesting book of lamentations.

The next morning, about nine o'clock, the poor fellow was discovered and relieved from his unpleasant situation, when at the same time the fact of the bank robbery was made apparent.

Ten thousand in money and an equal amount in bonds were stolen, but the greatest excitement was caused by the report that the cashier was missing.

Evidences of a terrific struggle were seen in his office, and even blood was noticed on the furniture; but the belief that Theo Howard was an accomplice in the burglary became general, and gained ground each succeeding hour.

Finally, after a lapse of two days, a workman, in excavating near the opening of a sewer, discovered the body of a man wedged in the man-hole.

His excited cries attracted other persons to the locality, and, as the corpse was brought to light, the

clothing was at once recognized as belonging to the missing cashier; but unfortunately the face was so badly mutilated that recognition so far as that part of the body was concerned was impossible.

Notwithstanding this uncertainty, a scar on the scalp, the color of the hair, the general appearance, all conspired to prove the identity of the corpse, and the verdict of the coroner was that Theo Howard had come to his death by injuries received at the hands of persons unknown.

Detectives were at once set to work upon the case, but the burglars had done their work so well that no clew could be found either to the missing money or the thieves into whose hands it had passed.

One fact was settled, however; the innocence of Howard was fully established, and those who had known the young man were rejoiced to have it proved that, coupled with his abilities were thorough integrity, honesty, and bravery; for had he not died in defense of the property of others?

In the meantime what had happened our hero?

Leaving the bank, he hurried home to finish some writing, and found lying in a conspicuous place a letter in the well-known chirography of Stark.

"Come at once," it read, "to No. — Arch street. Your presence is absolutely necessary, as business of the utmost importance is to be immediately transacted."

There was no signature, as it was, of course, an understood thing that the handwriting of two such close friends was perfectly familiar to each other.

Theo lost no time making his way to the place indicated, and was admitted at once by Stark, who had been on the lookout for him.

"What's up?" he asked. "Something must be wrong, for I never knew you to be in such haste before."

"Something is wrong," was Stark's reply, his finger on his lips. "Come into this room. By the way," he added, in an undertone, "did you bring your money with you?"

"Yes, I have it in large bills."

As Theo entered the room indicated he noticed that it already possessed an occupant, a rough looking man with bushy hair and slouchy clothes; in short, not such a man as would be likely to inspire confidence in himself.

"Theo," said Stark, by way of introduction, "this is the gentleman I mentioned to you, Mr. Scott. As you understand, he is to be our companion shortly."

Theo nodded. He could not bring himself to take this dissipated, desperate looking fellow by the hand, and the latter seemed as little inclined to familiarity as himself.

If Stark noticed any coolness between them he concealed it all under a smile, and immediately proceeded to the business before them.

"Doubtless, you will wonder at this sudden call, Theo," he began; "but matters have taken on a new phase which must be at once boldly met by us. It seems that some of our plans have been discovered," with a look of interrogation at Scott as if for approval.

"That's the idea," said the other, gruffly; "they've been discovered."

"You will remember that we had agreed upon a start next week, and some of our arrangements have already been made with that end in view. I have lifted all my money, and it seems that you have

done the same thing. A few minor matters are still unsettled, but, on the whole, we will not be inconvenienced greatly by a change in the date of our departure."

"What do you mean?" asked Theo.

"We must start at once."

"At once?"

"This very night."

"An utter impossibility," Theo said, firmly. "If a start must be made to-night, then make it without me."

Scott glanced at Stark as if to see what course his leader would pursue.

"Why can't you go now?"

"Business at the bank requires my presence. I had appointed to-night for some work there; besides, I told Mr. Daniels I would not leave until next week."

"But don't you see this is a sudden emergency, one that admits of no delay, provided that you wish to share in the fortune we are about to secure? Write him a note stating that you are called away suddenly, and leave the business in his hands. I shall see that the note reaches him, for you will not have a moment to lose if you wish to go with us."

Theo looked perplexed.

"A strange business all around," he said.

"The fact of the matter," put in Scott, "is simply this: Yer friend Stark hyer has been a leetle too liberal to me in the way of money, and I've a habit o' bein' summat too liberal to myself in the way o' liquor. Well, night afore last I h'isted a trifle too much liquid pison, and as a consekens became too talkative. I let out most of my errand in this hyer town to a couple o' pilgrims not any better than

they ort to be, and when they thort I was about done for, they began to lay a plot to jump my claim. By pretendin' I was too drunk to notice anything, I succeeded in getting on to their game from first to last. They start to-morrow, and if we want to head them off we've got to git away to-night, and no mistake. Lemme tell you another thing; they're going to watch us like hawks to see that we don't go afore they do."

"Us?" asked Theo, sharply. "What do they know of us?"

"Oh, they know all about it. I let more out than I intended that night."

"I'll tell you my plan," interrupted Stark. "Scott doesn't like it, but I think it's about the only thing we can do that is reasonably sure to be successful. We must disguise ourselves as farmers, and ride out of town on horseback, ostensibly on our return home from the city, but in the direction of B——, the nearest station we can reach at which the western train stops. There we can cast aside our disguises, buy our tickets, and board the train."

"It seems to me," remarked Theo, doubtfully, "that such a plan would be a roundabout way of circumventing a couple of rogues. Why not go directly to the depot here?"

"They'd detect us sure then, disguise or no disguise, for they are on the watch there. Come, write your note to Mr. Daniels, and while you eat a bite and change your clothes, I shall get a boy to take your communication to its destination."

Theo, convinced against his will, but falling in with his friend's judgment in his anxiety to retrieve his shattered fortunes, did as requested, and when

he had finished the missive surrendered it into Stark's hands.

The latter retired from the room, struck a match, applied the flame to the envelope, and after watching it consume slowly away, lighted his cigar with the last dying embers, and then returned to the presence of him he was wont to call his dearest friend.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HIGHWAYMAN.

The shadows of darkness had fallen upon the city as out of a livery stable rode two farmers, one of them leading a horse by the bridle.

As they drew up before the door of the inn to which the stable served as an attachment, another farmer, stoop-shouldered and somewhat past middle age, hobbled out, conversing at the same time with the proprietor.

"Come, Jabez," said one of the riders, impatiently, "it's time we was on our way long ago."

"Yes, yes; I'll be there d'rectly," and with a parting word Jabez mounted the block, and from thence seated himself on his horse after much grumbling at the rheumatics, which seemed to interfere greatly with his movements.

The trio then rode off, while the inn-keeper gazed after them a little curiously.

"Never saw them fellows before; must be new settlers in this part of the country; but the queer part of it is, their horses don't appear to look like farm animals. They seem more like city nags."

In the meantime the so-called farmers were pursuing their way through the city.

"It seems to me," the one who had not yet spoken said, in low tones, "that every one even in the darkness is looking on me with suspicious eyes."

"Imagination, of course," was Jabez' answer, given in almost a whisper. "It goes hard with one of your spirit to do a thing like this, but by the time you again reach Minneapolis you will have become accustomed to that kind of strategy and enjoy it amazingly well, no doubt."

"I hope the game is worth the candle."

"Of course it is. Don't I risk as much, ay, more than you? And yet my faith in the venture will not allow me to think of such a thing as failure."

"What tickles me," remarked the third man, "is how we outwitted them two chaps wot thought that they had outwitted me. Jest as soon as we get out of this penned-up place you'll hear the all-firedest hoss-laugh as ever come out'n a human critter."

"Keep it back as long as possible," remarked Jabez, with a smile. "Don't let's crow any till we reach the claim."

"All right, boss; I'll do the best I can—jest take it out in chucklin' to myself. It won't cost nothin', and will afford me a heap of amusement."

By this time they had reached the outskirts of the city where only a light here and there was visible, and they consequently felt comparatively safe from pursuit.

Soon all traces of the town they had lately left disappeared, and they were now compelled to pick their way in the complete darkness that had fallen upon the land.

They had ridden an hour in this way when he of the horse-laugh suddenly stopped his animal with an exclamation of deep disgust.

"See here, boys, stop a minute. This confounded girth has come loose, and I'll have to dismount to fix it."

He slid to the ground nimbly as a cat, and busied himself with the loosened girth.

At last he seemed to have put the refractory piece of leather in due submission.

"Now, friend Jabez, mayn't I heave out that hoss-laugh?"

"I suppose it's safe enough here, but tone it down; you know not who may be listening."

For answer the fellow burst out into such a hearty guffaw as made the echoes ring.

The effect was certainly different from what one of the pseudo farmers imagined was in store for them, for scarcely had the sound died away when from four separate points in the surrounding bushes as many men rushed forth and grappled with our travelers.

One of them selected Scott, and rolled over and over in the dust with him, neither seeming to gain any advantage, while a second rushed at Jabez, and with a quick motion pulled him off his steed.

"Save yourself!" cried he to Theo, sinking to the earth, with a groan as though badly hurt.

The two remaining assailants rushed furiously at the cashier, but were not destined to be so successful as their partners had proven.

Drawing his revolver, the young man fired directly in the face of one of the foe, or rather made an attempt to do so, but the weapon did not go off.

Pulling the trigger again with the same result, he immediately began to use the revolver as a club, and with such good effect that one of the attacking

party suddenly retired from the battle with a physiognomy much the worse for the wear.

The second rogue had meanwhile been busy on the other side, and with the well directed blow of a club he partially stunned Theo, who toppled from his horse, and the next moment was securely bound and gagged.

By this time all noise of the conflict had ceased, and Theo supposed that his friends had been conquered, perhaps killed. They had at all events disappeared.

Three men, a few minutes after he had been secured, raised him bodily, and took up their line of march through a thickly wooded tract to their left.

Fifteen minutes' walking brought the party within sight of a gloomy looking structure which finally resolved itself into a stone house, once occupied, but now tumble-down and tenanted only by rats and other vermin.

Through the crazy door the men carried their burden, and deposited it in an inner room. One of them now struck a match, and lighted a smoky lamp that stood on the dusty mantel.

By this time Theo discovered that his captors wore masks, and that they were a rough looking set of fellows, well armed and evidently desperate.

"Sorry we can't offer you better accommodations than these," said one; "but the fact is, this shaky old barn don't belong to us any more than to you. It's simply a temporary resting place. But you'll get used to it by and by. I've no doubt," with a significant leer, "by the time you get ready to come out, you'll imagine this a brown stone front on Fifth avenue, and perhaps refuse to come out at all. Now, if you promise to be docile and lamb-like, I'll

ease you up somewhat, and remove that piece of leather from your mouth. It's not the cleanest piece we could find, but I suspect it is more uncomfortable than it is dirty. Now, just give a quiet nod that you'll preserve a quiet demeanor, and I'll remove it."

Theo made the required gesture, and was immediately in a position to talk.

"Where are my friends?" he asked, with a quaking of the heart.

"Oh, they're all right. We thought it best to separate you."

"Were any of them injured?"

"Well, yes; that millionaire mine owner got too lively for his man, and had to be knocked on the head—just a little tap, you understand—but that ain't nothing to a man of his constitution. He'll recover in the course of a few hours, and feel all the better for it."

"And Stark; what of him?"

The robber laughed.

"Why, he's a coward. He just knelt and begged for mercy."

"I don't believe it."

"All right; that's your privilege, but he did it just the same."

"He has too much courage for that."

"Maybe he has, but he must have left it at home this trip."

"What was your object in waylaying us?"

"I'd ruther not tell."

"It will leak out anyhow."

"Well, say it was money if you like."

"I suppose you got it, then."

"Certainly. Then you may add a little revenge."

"And you've obtained that, doubtless."

"Not at all. You've struck the wrong party when you insinuate that we trifle with such a weepson. Oh, no! we're after the solid ducats. But then another party wants the revenge; the pootiest article I ever saw," and the speaker rolled his eyes as if in ecstasy at the vision he beheld.

"Who is that?" asked Theo, in quick suspicion.

"I'll leave the party to introduce herself, for I know she is dying to secure an interview. Come, boys, let the lady have a chance," and the three with smiles and nods immediately left the room.

"A wild thought has just entered my mind," muttered Theo; "but I have dismissed it as unworthy of entertainment for a single moment. Irene Trainer certainly has had nothing to do with this—how could she? Alas! how my bright hopes of fortune have in a moment's time been destroyed, perhaps forever. All my money gone, and death maybe staring me in the face. Had I followed Mr. Daniels' advice, I would have been safe at this instant, my money would still be securely invested, and prosperity would have been a natural consequence. But I will not despair. I am young; I have some little ability, and this experience may be of great advantage to me. I shall certainly not submit to staying here any length of time if the determination to get out will assist me any. Then for Myra and happiness."

A rustle at his side, and he knew that some one had entered the room.

Looking up he beheld the well-known face and form of the Queen.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRICE OF LIBERTY.

Theo gazed at the girl steadily for a minute, as if to divine her guilt or innocence in connection with his capture.

There was evidently an expression of malicious triumph in her face, although she looked very pretty through it all, as Theo himself was feign to confess.

"How do you like your new quarters?" she inquired, very composedly.

"You have given me neither the time nor opportunity of examining them, that is if you have had anything to do with the affair," he answered, thinking it best to fall in with her humor.

"Of course I have had something to do with it," she said, quickly; "I want you to understand from the beginning that I have had everything to do with it. You will not, therefore, have any excuse for blaming any one else."

"What, pray, has been your object in this strange proceeding?"

"Need you ask me?"

"I certainly do. A man has a right to know why another man assaults and kidnaps him on the open highway."

"You remember our last meeting?"

"I do."

"How you scorned my advances?"

"I simply refused them."

"I felt it just as much as if you had declared that you loathed me."

"Has not a man the privilege of refusing whom he pleases?"

"Under certain circumstances I would concede that right; but not in your case."

"Why not?"

"Didn't you visit me for six months, show me every attention, spend your money freely upon me, and virtually declare that you cared for me?"

Theo was silent.

"I claim an answer."

"I confess I did wrong, but the wrong was committed against another person."

Irene's lip curled.

"Of course I know what you mean, and I am fully aware that you don't take me into account. You assume it as granted that I have no heart, no feelings to be trampled upon, but I think myself capable of showing you differently."

"I don't in the least doubt your ability now to do anything that is devilish," said Theo, carelessly; "though I can scarcely see what you intend to accomplish by such a course."

"You will be shown in due time. Suppose, for instance, that you fail to return home, what agony will your proud beauty, the banker's daughter, suffer when uncertainty as to your fate, pain of prolonged separation, and a thousand other griefs gnaw at her vitals?"

"You have no heart!" said Theo, angrily.

"How could I," she answered, mockingly, "when you have it all, or had it, I'd better say?"

"Will you answer one question?"

"Certainly; you know how fond I am of conversation with you. It's my especial weakness."

"How did you obtain information of our departure?"

"In the simplest and most accidental way in the world. A couple of men stumbled by some lucky chance into a restaurant where I was seated, taking some refreshments last evening. They were not the most prepossessing of men, and I would not have noticed them at all had not a word spoken in low tones reached my ears. That word was your name. In an instant I was all attention, and, unseen by them, drew nearer on pretense of picking up a fallen article from the floor. My ruse was successful even if I did but catch only a few words. They were aware that you were about to leave town in company with your good friend Stark, and were waiting for the first opportunity to get away. I hesitated no longer, but at once introduced myself, stating that I was after revenge, and would be satisfied with only you as its object; they might keep whatever money they should find upon your person. It did not take long to persuade them, in view of the fact that I was able to give them not a little information on points they were ignorant of. It is sufficient to say that your every movement was thereafter scrutinized closely, and even when you were riding the streets of Minneapolis in your becoming farmer costumes, your footsteps were as closely dogged as ever man's were. Our plot was successful, as you know already. My robber friends have the money; I shall have my revenge!"

"Where is Scott?"

"He's safe enough in another apartment, and will be freed in due time."

"I should not be greatly surprised to ascertain that he is one of your confederates. His looks are

about on a par with the desperadoes who were in this room a few minutes ago."

"He isn't a very handsome fellow, that is true, but his looks are surely no fault of his. He certainly seemed to fight hard enough for his liberty."

"And Stark; what of him?" Theo asked, eagerly.

"That is what troubles me," she replied, in apparently perplexed tones. "What disposition will be made of him I have not yet decided. If he is allowed to go, I am afraid he will create trouble for us. He isn't one who is likely to submit to any such high-handed proceedings as were instituted against him to-night."

"I should think not," said Theo, warmly, "and I believe you were very foolish to detain him or even me, from motives of revenge. You will certainly suffer in the end."

The girl's face flushed as she seemed to hesitate about taking a contemplated step that would perhaps humiliate her deeply, but it soon became evident that she had fully made up her mind.

"You are completely in my power."

"It seems so," with a look of disgust.

"You can free yourself by a word."

"Certainly not an exorbitant ransom."

"Shall I mention my terms?"

"I presume it would do no harm."

"Then give me your love, and you will be free in a moment's time."

Would it do to temporize with her, and thus gain a fresh lease on life?

"Remember," cried the Queen, "no subterfuge, no treachery! Give me your word, and I know you will act squarely."

Theo set his features firmly.

"You had my answer once."

"Think well before you give it again. Take what time you like, and recollect that the proud pale-faced girl you have chosen can never lavish upon you a tithe of the love I will give you; then compare the life you will lead with the fate that threatens you should you refuse. I have sworn that you shall never wed Myra Ferry."

Theo looked in wonder upon this deluded woman. She must be insane to act so.

"It is not necessary for me to take a moment for thought. I could not under the circumstances be the recipient of even life at your hands."

A demon of fury seemed to possess his companion at this reply; her countenance became the prey of a thousand conflicting emotions, while she paced the floor in a vain effort to control herself.

"You will live to regret these words, Theo Howard! You are the first man who has ever scorned me, and I shall see that such slurs are repaid with interest. You don't know what is in store for you, or you would grovel in the dust at my feet for deliverance."

At that she swept from the room with the air of an outraged queen.

CHAPTER X.

A DASH FOR FREEDOM,

Theo Howard, in spite of his dreary surroundings and painful situation, in spite of the exciting adventures he had just passed through, soon fell asleep, and when he awoke the sun was well up in the heavens.

He found that his limbs were swollen and numb from contact with the cords which held him prisoner with remorseless and undiminished vigor.

He at once began the attempt to free himself, but he might as well have desisted, for not one fraction of an inch did his bonds give way.

A low, malicious laugh greeted his efforts; he had had a witness to his futile struggles.

"Try again, dear friend! You know the old maxim," and with these words Irene Trainer came into view.

Theo made no answer.

"I should have told you when we parted last night, though I was just a little too excited to think of doing so, that your quarters would be changed to-day, so as to allow you somewhat more freedom, with but little risk to ourselves; so you see I am not wholly bad yet."

"Release me, and I'll promise not to molest you."

"Why should I take such a step as would place us exactly on the same footing as we occupied prior to last evening? Oh, no! you may consider yourself a prisoner still."

"Hard-hearted woman!"

"Hard-hearted man! We are even on that score."

"There is something else back of your pretended love for me," said Theo, suddenly. "No woman is going to make such a fool of herself all for love."

"There may be something else, possibly hate," was the malicious reply.

"I am convinced, despite your words, that I am the victim of a plot in which you are merely trying to hoodwink me by pretending a love of which you are incapable."

"What penetration!"

"Else why should you be satisfied with my conduct as long as I was content to squander my money in drink and gaming at your house without mentioning such a thing as love?"

"A veritable Solomon for wisdom, but you have commenced to display it somewhat too late to be of any advantage to you."

"Too true, alas! but I can wait for the denouement with such fortitude as I may possess."

"So be it; but the charm of your conversation has caused me to forget my errand. You are now to be removed to a different apartment, in which your bonds can be dispensed with, and your body given a freedom which will doubtless prove most welcome."

A knock on the door brought two men, who, without a word, lifted Theo and bore him away, followed by the girl.

They passed through a hall, then traversed several chambers, and finally descended a dark flight of stairs, pausing at length before a grim looking door. This was opened, and the party entered.

Theo was deposited on the damp and musty floor of the apartment, in which he was destined to pass many a weary and miserable day.

The place was in almost total darkness, save a weak ray of light that struggled in through a small chink near the ceiling.

"Loose him, boys, and make him as comfortable as you can," said the Queen, with an aggravating smile, as she stood at the door.

One of the men whipped out his knife, and a moment later Theo was free.

Why not make an attempt for liberty?

The thought and the deed were almost simultaneous. Lying perfectly still but for a second or two,

until his blood should course through his cramped limbs, he leaped to his feet.

One of the desperadoes was between him and the door, fortunately for the prisoner, having his back turned.

With an agile leap Theo grasped him by the throat, and tossed him against the wall with such terrific force as to knock him senseless.

But he was not yet free, for the quick-witted girl, with a cry of warning, sprang outside, closed the door, and bolted it just as Theo threw himself against it with full weight.

His other opponent, a powerfully-built fellow, was now upon him, and a terrible struggle ensued between them.

The young cashier had not neglected his physical education, and although of a much lighter mold, he proved a full match for his burly antagonist.

The latter was gradually getting the worst of the contest, when his partner, regaining his senses, took in the situation.

Seizing the rung of a chair which had fallen apart from age, he crept close to the contestants, and brought it down with cruel force on Theo's devoted head.

The young man sank to the floor without a groan.

"I'd like to do that again," said the angry fellow, eying his weapon with a glow of satisfaction.

"Never mind, Clell; remember our orders," said the other. "Let's leave him."

The couple knocked at the door, which was opened by Irene, after she was assured that the contest had terminated in their favor.

"'Twas lucky, girl, that you were standing at the door," said he who was called Clell, feeling ten-

derly the spot on the side of his head which had come in contact with the wall; "but I'm sorry you didn't call out sooner. I'll have the headache for a week now."

"He was a pretty tough nut to crack," said the other, grimly. "I never saw so much muscle put up in so small a space before."

"You didn't hurt him, Charlie," said the girl, quickly.

"Well, no; but if Clell hadn't come to my aid, I reckon he'd have hurt me; so Clell tapped him on the cocoanut just hard enough to make him let go. Oh, he's all right by this time. Come, Clell, let's go and attend to our little affair now."

The two worthies walked away, followed by the Queen in thoughtful mood.

Food was brought to the prisoner but once that day, though it was very substantial both in quality and amount.

Theo attempted to open up a conversation with his jailer, having some hope that he might thereby stumble upon a clew to the real cause of his incarceration, but that worthy, who had experienced a taste of our hero's muscular powers, seemed in no mood whatever for measuring words with him. Clell cut him off gruffly, and soon retired.

More days came, and with them promptly appeared Clell, who always brought a generous repast.

"Get ready," he said, as he went away on one occasion; "spruce up, for you are shortly to have a visitor."

A few minutes later Theo heard a trampling outside the door, the bolts were drawn aside, and a party of four entered; Irene, Clell and Charlie, the

latter two having a person in charge who seemed to be very much in the same predicament as Theo.

"Here is your visitor," said Clell, in his usual tones. "Take a good look at him."

The Queen carried in her hand a small lamp, which seemed only to make the darkness more hideous. This she placed on a recess in the wall, and then looked curiously at her prisoner.

If she expected signs of submission or dawning love, she read them not in his countenance; naught but indifference reigned there.

"Stark!" exclaimed Theo, joyfully. "Why, old fellow, what's up?"

The latter exclamation was doubtless caused by the appearance of the new-comer.

Stark, to all intents and purposes, had changed dreadfully within the last few days.

His eyes had become sunken; his cheeks looked cadaverous; his form was no longer erect and aggressive, and he had the expression generally of a starving man.

"Ask these men," he replied, in a quavering voice. "They are the authors of all my misery."

"Tell him yourself, partner," said the man who was called Charlie, in a brutal tone of voice. "Lay our terms before him."

"Never! I'll starve to death first."

"We'll tell him, then, in the course of time, and we'll let you starve just the same, unless the young gentleman toes the scratch."

The Queen turned with the others, and left the room without a word; not once had Theo looked upon her, and her heart was full of anger at his conspicuous indifference.

Stark sank into the only chair the room afforded, and gave utterance to a sigh of misery.

"I'm about done for, Theo," he said.

"Is it possible that they are starving you, or were the men simply perpetrating some horrible joke?"

"Alas! it is only too true."

"What is their purpose?"

"That I cannot tell you."

"You mean that you will not?"

"I would rather not talk upon the subject."

"But it concerns me."

"Not enough to interest you one way or the other."

"It is your duty to tell me the whole story; at least, it will do no harm to let me have a full understanding of the situation."

"It would work harm to you."

"In what way?"

"Simply by playing upon your sympathy. There, now, I shall say no more. Let them do what they will, they shall never bend me to their plans."

It was in vain that Theo urged his companion to make known the plot their captors had formed; Julian was inflexible, and when his keeper came after him, he walked away as resolutely as his strength would permit.

Clell winked knowingly as he remarked to Theo:

"The young fellow's game, but just about one more day will fetch him to time."

CHAPTER XI.

THE DETECTIVE VISITS BOB YOUNGER.

"Sam's Place," a saloon neither good nor bad in reputation as saloons go, was in a blaze of glory.

The bar was crowded with a miscellaneous assortment of men both in nationality and appearance, as well as in character.

As the clock struck eleven a young man of fashion strolled into the saloon, and looked leisurely about him.

A dainty mustache, a glass screwed to his eye, the cut of his clothes, all conspired to proclaim him a member of dudedom.

A few remarks, complimentary and otherwise, were directed toward him by the loafers who had noticed his entrance, but he found it convenient to disregard them.

His eye finally sighted the proprietor, and the next moment he bore down upon that functionary with the question, "Aw, cawn you show me to room number three, landlawd? Hawv an appointment to meet a pawty tha-ah at eleven."

Mine host observed his interlocutor from head to foot before answering him.

The latter stood the scrutiny with heroic fortitude.

"Haven't made any mistake, stranger?"

"Mistake? Oh, no; it's all right, I assuah you."

"What name shall I give the other party?"

"It's of no consequence whatevah. Please show me to the room, and I shall be obliged to you."

"Very well, sir. This way."

The dude followed Sam up stairs, and was finally ushered into the desired apartment.

"Hawv any pawties made inqwiwies faw this room pwevious to me?" he asked, carefully placing his hat upon the table, and then seating himself.

"None as yet."

"If any pusson awsks faw me or faw room num-

ber three, which is just the same, bwing him to me at once."

The landlord paused at the door.

"See here, stranger, is this all on the square? Remember, I don't want any monkey work."

"Squa-ah as a die, sir. 'Pon my honah, I assuah you it is, as far as I am indiividually concerned, a mere evwy day appointment."

Mine host retired but half satisfied, not placing great stress evidently on the "honah" of his fashionable guest.

Three minutes later the door was opened cautiously, and a feminine head appeared.

"Is this room number three?" she inquired, in diffident tones.

"Yes, my deah," said the gallant young man, effusively, "come in and look awound."

"I'm afraid of you," she said, pursing her lips.

"Am I so fwightful looking as all that?" reproachfully.

"No, but you've got too much style for me."

"Weally, I like you-ah looks, 'mazing well, my deah. Do come in a little farth-ah anyhow. You-ah landlawd might discover you and waise a fuss."

The girl, emboldened by his persuasion, pushed the door open farther, and stood in full view.

A coquettish mobcap placed jauntily on her curly head, supplemented by a short and plain but clean costume, proclaimed her occupation to be that of chambermaid.

"Thank you, sir; but Sam isn't my landlord."

"And you aw not a chambermaid?"

"No."

"What the devil are you, then?"

She gave a feminine shriek of horror.

"I'm afraid you are a bad, bad man! You're an awful swearer."

"Tell me what you want."

"Belton, the detective."

"Close the door, then."

The girl looked at him curiously as she complied with his order.

"You're not Belton."

"Yes, I am; but you're not Bob Younger."

"Of course not. He did not dare come here."

"No more dangerous for him than for me."

"He was afraid you would have a force here to capture him."

"And I might have been afraid of foul play in coming to a place like this."

"Sam knows nothing of this meeting, at least from our side, and treachery could hardly be practiced without connivance on his part,"

Belton was convinced that such was the case.

"What is your object in coming here?"

"To make sure that you would be willing to meet him and come to some arrangements regarding the information of the robbery."

"I would understand from your remark and the tenor of the note I received that he was concerned in the affair."

"Before I answer that question I must state that you are not acting out your character of gallant."

"Why?"

"You haven't even asked me to be seated."

"Sure enough. How thoughtless of me! Be kind enough to take this chair."

He purposely placed it so that she would be seated with her back to the door, for he was determined if treachery were intended that she should have no

part in it. Then he took his stand in front of her, so that he could easily see any one approach the door from the outside.

"Now proceed with your answer."

"Bob Younger is a member of the gang that robbed the Fidelity Bank."

"He wishes to blow on his pals?"

"Yes; he claims that they had a dispute about the division of the money, and that a dreadful quarrel followed, in which the rest combined against him. Naturally he seeks revenge, provided he will be freed from any participation in the matter."

"Does he mean to turn State's evidence?"

"No. He wouldn't live two days if he should do that. His idea is to give information concerning the plans and whereabouts of the gang, and thereupon leave the country before any arrests are made."

"How many were there in the party?"

"I am allowed to tell you no more."

"You seem greatly interested in this man."

The girl blushed.

"I hardly see how that need concern you," she said, with some spirit.

"But it does. I dislike to see any pretty young girl like you deliberately throw herself away on a scoundrel and desperado such as this fellow appears to be."

"Oh, but you don't know Bob," she cried, enthusiastically; "he's not so bad as you imagine, and then," she added, softly, "he loves me."

"Deluded woman! how long will such affection last?"

"Always! Ah, sir, will you not agree to meet him?"

"I'm afraid not, girl, unless he will consent to surrender himself."

She clasped her hands on the detective's arm, and looked pleadingly into his face, the tears welling up into her eyes.

"Can nothing move you? Let me plead with you."

"It is useless."

Her arms slipped suddenly about his neck in her earnestness.

Belton was a man of iron. Accustomed to women's wiles, he felt that he was proof against their allurements, and he was. But the girl, in spite of his watchfulness, had accomplished her purpose. He imagined that danger, if danger existed, would be guarded against by watching the door carefully, and scarcely a moment during their conversation had his eyes left it; but this little by-play had distracted his attention from other points, and the noise the girl made in her emotion, real or otherwise, prevented his hearing the door of the wardrobe directly behind him open.

The figure of a man disguised, with a heavy beard, stepped forth softly. In his hand was clutched a sandbag, evidently for the purpose of silencing his intended victim.

Three noiseless strides he took, and the weapon came down with a faint thud.

Belton's head dropped forward, and his body rolled to the floor.

A moment later a pair of handcuffs encircled his wrists, and a cord bound his ankles. Then the disguised man and his accomplice stood aside to await the return to consciousness.

"Well done, my noble queen; you were certainly born for the stage."

"Thank you for the compliment. Now we'll see what you can do."

Belton soon gave signs of returning animation, and when he fully realized his situation, he gave vent to a good-humored laugh.

"Hoodwinked, by Jove! And a woman at the bottom of it, too. There are some sharp females, though, and that chambermaid is one of 'em. Hello! here yet?" as his eye fell upon the Queen. "I was just wondering why you didn't kill me while you were at the job."

"Give us time; we are not through with you yet."

"Better hurry up, then, for I'm liable to slip away any moment. If I do, your cake is dough. Ahoy there, Mr. Pirate," as he noticed the man for the first time; "you must be feeling in pretty good shape to-night, judging from that tap you gave me."

"You certainly display much levity for a man in your serious situation," was the deep-toned answer.

"Oh, come, now," said Belton, plaintively. "Don't impose on me that way. I'm not in a position to stand much of that kind of thing. Use your natural voice, for it will save you much trouble, and won't make me any the wiser. I've never seen your ugly mug before, and I know I've never heard that voice till this minute."

"We have a little business with you."

"So I suppose. You've transacted some of it already, haven't you?"

"That was necessary"

"You'd better finish before you release me."

"We expect to, but how it will terminate depends much on the character of the answers you give."

"Fire away. Put question number one to me."

"You visited the cemetery to-night?"

"Easily answered. Yes."

"You made a discovery."

"A what?"

"A discovery."

"Oh, yes; we discovered something very strange."

"What was that?"

"A dead corpse!"

"A truce to your nonsense. What did you open the grave for?"

"The fact is, Miss Ferry desired it. She can't get it into her head—couldn't, rather—that her lover was dead."

"She is now satisfied?"

"She is. I did my best to convince her that it was really Howard who was buried there, but the unfortunate girl was so crazed with grief and despair that nothing less than disinterment would satisfy her. Poor thing! She's more than convinced now."

"You are on the track of the burglars?"

"No, not exactly; just trying to get there."

"Are you to be bought off?"

"Can you restore Theo Howard to life?"

"Come, now; every man has his price. What is yours?"

"You waste time in attempting to bribe me. My answer, once for all, is, restore everything to its normal condition before the robbery, and I'll desist from my task. As you know that to be an impossibility, you are at liberty to draw your own conclusions."

"You are not afraid of death?"

"Oh, that doesn't trouble me in the least. You are not going to do murder in a place like this, and

you know that; so you may as well allow me to go."

"Let me warn you again. You are running against a combination much more powerful than you have any idea of, and if this friendly admonition is disregarded, our next move will be a most decisive one. Your life will be the forfeit."

"Very well, I shall hold up my end."

"Be on your guard, then. You were brought here simply for the purpose of being warned, and you will perform the wisest act of your life by doing as we tell you. We go now, and you can doubtless secure your release in a very easy manner, giving what explanation you please."

The next moment the couple had disappeared.

CHAPTER XII.

BELTON AND THE JANITOR.

"Umbrellies to mend! Umbrellies to mend!" were the words that came from an unmistakably Irish throat.

A merry son of the Emerald Isle was picking his way along the alley by the side of the Fidelity Bank, from time to time uttering the cry of his trade, interspersed with an occasional half-muttered, half-sung melody of his native land.

The fellow was evidently drunk, and a policeman some distance away was debating the propriety or impropriety of locking him up until such time as he could walk in a comparatively straight line.

By dint of persistent effort, however, the man of umbrellas succeeded in progressing forward until he reached the side or basement door of the bank, which he found open.

Grasping the frame with both hands, he steadied himself, and peered into the gloomy entrance.

"Any umbrellies to mend?" he howled. "Hello, you son of a gun!" he added, as he observed the janitor frowning at him.

"Fwhat the divil are yez callin' me?" inquired that functionary, raising his broom with the evident intention of making a rush at his adversary should the latter become too abusive.

"I called yez a son of a gun; are ye now satisfied, ye spalpeen."

"Come in here," shouted Hayes, in a fit of anger, "and I'll spile yer face for yez!"

The janitor was a brave man, but he was not anxious to figure in a street brawl; hence his invitation to enter.

"Bedad, that's fwhat I'll do," said the other, and slamming the door, he started toward his doughty opponent, but his pack of umbrellas suddenly became detached and scattered in every direction, a particularly obstreperous one getting between his feet with the final effect that the owner went sprawling.

The next moment Hayes had pounced upon him, and held him a prisoner.

"Now," cried he, in triumphant tones, "I'm goin' to spile yer face! No, begorra, I can't do that; it was spiled in the makin'!" he added, on closer inspection.

"Let me up, and upon me soul I'll forgive yez," said the drunken man. "Say, now, me jewel, I've a drop of the crayther in me insoide pocket, do ye moind, and ye shall have it—some of it, I mane," he added, hurriedly, as an amendment to his extraordinary generosity.

Hayes' one weakness was a love of whisky, and his vanquished foe could not have obtained his release so quickly in any other way.

He, however, satisfied himself first that the flask existed otherwise than in the imagination of the umbrella mender before he allowed him to be on terms of equality with himself.

"Bedad, this is better nor fightin'," suggested the stranger, taking a swig of the liquor in turn.

"I didn't want to fight," said Hayes, with dignity; "I was only protectin' the property of me employers."

"And it is Moike Murphy as is the most peaceable man in the world. Didn't we both make a mishtake that toime?"

"I was protectin' the bank," insisted Hayes.

"Yis, and ye got along better nor one other night two wakes ago," with a horrible grin.

The janitor's face suddenly sobered.

"Ah, me! That was a terrible affair. I'll niver fergit it, niver!"

"Ye laid for hours bound loike a criminal, I hear."

"Faith, so I did, bad luck to the thavin' rascals!"

"Did they wear masks?"

"Did they? That I doan't know, seein' as I didn't lay me eyes on aven wan of thim."

"You seen the young cashier, thin?"

"Oh, yis, and heard him, too. Ay, but the poor crayther was in a good humor that night with his singin' and his whistlin'. I jist said to mesilf, sez I, 'Tommy, the cashier's had a letter from his swateheart,' and so I belave he had."

"Then ye are sure ye seen him?"

"Seen him with me two eyes. Av coorse I did. Didn't he go apast me through this very dure?"

"Think now, me frind; did ye see his face?"

Hayes scratched his head, which was now becoming somewhat addled under the influence of the liquor he had absorbed.

"Well, now, whin I come to think, I doan't be-lave I did see his face, because, doan't you see, jist as he passed me he took out his handkerchief, and give a big blast with his nose loud enough to awake the siven slapers; but the same hat, the same coat, the same pantaloons, all was there, and by the same token, Tommy Hayes would be willin' to oidentify him by an affidavit ony time. But why do you ask?"

"Begob, and didn't I know the lad mesilf? Haven't I dandled him on me knee when he was only so high? Don't I want to know all about me little frind? That's why I ask," and the mender of umbrellas seemed on the point of dissolving into tears.

"'Twas a sad blow to all on us," mused the other.

"And ye've niver found onything to detict the murderers?"

"No; but moind ye, there's a great hid workin' on the case, a foine detictive, who'll ferret out the mystery if ony one will."

"Who wears this great hid you're talkin' about?"

"Mr. Belton's the man."

"Look onything loike me?"

Hayes gave a sniff of contempt.

"Ye've no modesty, man. Yez couldn't live in the same day with him."

"Thank ye for your good opinion, sor. I always thought I was handsome, but ye're the first wan who iver told me so."

The janitor stared at him with a perplexed air.

"Jist say that again, will yez? Seems to me I've had a quare lot of visitors the day, onyhow. Farst one comes to me and sez, 'Did ye see Mr. Howard that noight,' and sez I, 'Yis;' then sez he, 'Air ye sure?' and I sez, 'Yis, sure.' And who should come along nixt but yer own drunken silf, and sez ye, 'Did ye see Mr. Howard's face?' And sez I, 'Av coorse I did,' and then yer impident enough to say, 'Air ye sure?' Now, what does this mane?" bringing his fist down on the table with resounding force.

"Tommy, can you keep a secret?" asked the other, dropping his brogue, a fact that the janitor noticed immediately, and seemed greatly alarmed thereby.

He was on the point of instant flight when his companion said, in low but hurried tones:

"I'm Belton myself. If you want to help matters on to a discovery, calm yourself, and act in a perfectly natural manner. You must not tell anybody that I have been here to-day."

"Sure an' I won't. I've forgotten it already."

"That's good. Now tell me what the man was like who asked you the same questions as I?"

"Oh, he was only a Dutchman, but, begorra, when I come to think how noicely ye fooled me, I wouldn't now care to take oath that he was man or baste."

"How long is it since he was here?"

"Half an hour."

"What!"

"Jist what I said—half an hour."

"When did he leave?"

"He didn't lave at all, as far as I know."

"Where did he go, then?"

"He axed lave to lay down in the corner there for a nap, as he was very slapy, and to tell the troot, he gave me a drop loike yerself; so I told him he might, seein' as I was goin' to stay in the room; but whin you come in with yer drunken antics I forgot all about the Dutchman."

Belton glanced keenly around the room, but the Dutchman had disappeared.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GERMAN TIN PEDDLER.

Myra Ferry was seated in her home, a prey to the most terrible anxiety. She had no confidant but the detective with whom she might share her hopes and fears, because it was Belton's desire that no one outside of themselves should know of the discovery that they had made.

In his long experience he had found that while two may keep a secret, three seldom can, so Myra's parents were not possessed of any other idea than that Theo Howard occupied the grave marked by his name.

While the girl was thus sadly musing, she heard the door-bell ring, and later a servant brought her a card engraved with Julian Stark's name. A flush came into her face, while her teeth were set firmly as she said:

"Admit him."

For the next few moments the girl had a terrible struggle to keep her emotions within bounds, but when Julian Stark was ushered into her presence she was perfectly calm.

"A sad meeting, Miss Myra," said her caller, feel-

ingly, as he bowed over her hand. "I call it so, because, knowing how intimate we were, you cannot help recalling associations of poor Theo."

If ever Myra had felt the necessity of acting a part it was certainly now, and she bent herself to the task.

Raising her handkerchief to her eyes ostensibly for the purpose of concealing her feeling, she replied:

"Yes, but I am glad to see you in spite of that. Many of his last hours must have been spent with you, and I would be glad to talk with you about his doings after I left for Europe."

"I would gladly accommodate you in that regard, Miss Myra; but had we better not postpone the talk until some future time? You are not looking well, and for me to bring up subjects of so dear yet sorrowful a nature, would be a rather impolitic as well as impudent proceeding."

"Perhaps you are right," sighed Myra.

The half hour that followed was really a very pleasant one. Stark was a very fluent talker, and he passed rapidly from one topic to another, always using the utmost tact in avoiding any reference to her unfortunate lover; and when he took his departure it was with an invitation to make her another call.

When Myra returned from the door to the room she had lately occupied, she found a visitor comfortably installed in an arm-chair.

He was of ample proportions, and had the undeniable air of the Fatherland.

"What are you doing here?" cried Myra, in surprise.

"Mine frent, I haf shust dropped in a leetle viles."

"Who showed you up here?" wondering if she had not a lunatic on her hands.

"Mine own self. I knows dot de serfants haf all been busy, and I shust shlipped in here to make mine business mit you ocquainted all py ourselves."

"What do you want?"

"I haf as fine a collection of tin pans, tin puckets, tin tins, in short, a full line of tins down in der pack yard as any one vould vish to see; unt I vould like to show em mit you."

"Oh, no; I don't want any such articles to-day."

"No artick-les to-day? Ven vill you wants 'em?"

"Not at all. How long have you been here?"

"Half an hour."

"What?"

"Shust vot I said. Dot young shentlemans vos a fine shbeaker, ain't he?" rolling his eyes in admiration. "Ven I vas in Vaterland, ach, mine Vaterland! I vas shust such a shbeaker," and his head sunk for a moment in recollection of his once happy German days.

Myra looked at her stolid visitor curiously for a short space of time, and then clapped her hands in girlish glee.

"Ah, Mr. Belton! for once you have failed."

The man looked up in alarm.

"Vat is das?"

"You are Belton, the detective."

"Oh, I acknowledge it, Miss Myra; you are about as quickwitted as any of them."

"No; I wouldn't have recognized you at all if it hadn't been for one thing. When you told me you had been here for half an hour, it occurred to me that you must have been hiding, and naturally came the thought that a simple German would have

no object in thus concealing himself, so I attributed it to you at once. When I suspected you, of course certain peculiar familiarities of style were brought to my attention, but you are certainly most cleverly disguised."

"We are sure of having no listeners here?"

"Perfectly; but are you certain you obtained entrance without detection?"

"Yes; I took good care of that."

"Has anything new been discovered?"

"No, nothing particular; but I'll tell you my object in coming here to-day. I wished to ascertain if Stark were identical with a certain gentleman I met last night. This I thought I could determine by listening to the tone of his natural voice while in conversation with you."

"Are you willing to impart the result of your discovery to me?"

"I am proud to say that you are the only woman beside my own wife to whom I would be willing to intrust any of my secrets. We two are working together for a purpose, and you have shown such excellent tact and judgment that nothing shall be kept from you. After I left you last night I received a note requesting a meeting with one of the supposed robbers, and in order to get on the track of the gentlemen, I went to the place of appointment, and met instead a young woman, who engaged me in conversation. The next thing I knew some one had rapped me over the head hard enough to lay me out senseless. When I recovered I observed a masked man present also, who attempted to buy me off. Finding that impossible, he resorted to threats, all his conversation being carried on in an assumed tone of voice. Certain of his peculiar intonations

and inflections which no one can get rid of, made me morally certain that should I hear the man use his ordinary mode of speech, under any favorable circumstances, I would be able to recognize it instantly.

"Assuming this costume, I began to shadow Stark with the idea of connecting him with the robbery. I was surprised to find him heading your way, but was glad that such was the case, because I knew I would have a good chance to listen. Slipping in at the door, I succeeded in getting behind that curtain while your backs were turned, and there I sat during your whole conversation. You are the best actress I've seen for many a day, Miss Ferry."

"But what discovery did you make?" asked the girl, eagerly.

"He's the man!"

"How?"

"There isn't the least doubt in my mind that the disguised fellow who laid me out last night and Julian Stark are the same persons."

"Isn't that awful!"

"Not such dreadful news as we may hear yet. I have reason to believe that there is a desperate band concerned in this thing, and that it is well organized. The members evidently are determined to keep track of affairs, for, as an instance, one of them this morning visited the bank in disguise, and tried to pump the janitor. He didn't succeed very well, from the fact that Hayes doesn't seem to know much more about the circumstances of the case than the merest stranger."

"Have you formed any plans for the future?"

"None except to watch and wait. That is the kind of game it will turn out to be. An expert detective

will be placed at once on Stark's track, and if the gentleman succeeds in shaking off his shadow he will be remarkably bright. With all this we must be exceedingly cautious, for did they suspect us to be possessed of such information as we have, our lives would not be worth a moment's purchase were we so unfortunate as to fall into their hands."

"But what of the girl—did you make any discoveries concerning her?"

"To tell the truth, I have not tried. She will be very easily hunted up, though. If Stark is the thoroughly bad man we have reason to believe, he must have associates in this town whom he will be obliged to go to some time or other; and this girl is undoubtedly one of them. I intend to hunt her up to-day, and while she was in a measure disguised last night, I don't believe I shall have any trouble recognizing her, provided, of course, that I am fortunate enough to lay my eyes on the female. In the meantime, Miss Myra, don't forget to be cautious. Remember that your safety just now is the principal thing, for in trying to save one person we run the risk of losing two. I shall take care to communicate with you frequently, either in person or by message, and don't be surprised to see me turn up under any disguise whatever."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TIN PEDDLER EXPLORING.

A daintily dressed lady was crossing Monroe street westward.

A stolid German was standing on the opposite side, seemingly in a quandary whether to cross eastward or continue down street.

A meerscham pipe, from which issued a lazy stream of smoke, decorated his mouth, while a pack of tin utensils adorned his ample back.

The woman's eye fell upon him carelessly in an incomprehensive glance, and then took in points of greater interest farther on.

Not so with the German. At the first look he almost dropped his pack, under the influence of some emotion.

"By shiminy crickets, vat a handsome vomans dot vos," he muttered, in admiration. "Shust like mine Katrina, plump enough, big enough, leedle enough. Ach, mine lady! I dink I shall keep you in mine vision."

He seemed now to have settled upon his course. Crossing the street, he meandered slowly on his way, now glancing vacantly at the signs overhead, now peering into the show windows, but not losing sight of the beautiful lady for one moment.

Finally she disappeared in a store, and the German suddenly discovered that his pipe needed replenishing. Placing his pack upon the sidewalk, he very deliberately drew a pouch of tobacco from his pocket.

"Mine pipe goes out mit itselluf too often. I haf some notions of trowing it away; it begins to schmell so strong. Now, my leedle match, vare vas you? Ach, dot vas a bad vcn; let us try anoder times."

Half a dozen matches were sacrificed before a satisfactory light was produced; then, taking a dozen puffs with the utmost satisfaction, he began to examine his utensils, whisking off imaginary particles of dust here, and putting a refractory pan under subjection there.

By this time the lady had again appeared on the

sidewalk, and giving a sharp glance up and down the street, she proceeded on her way.

"A sharp vimmens, I'll bet a glass of lager," the German soliloquized as he once again shouldered his merchandise. "Now, I'll shust wager mine pack against a penny she vas lookin' for me, but, by shiminy crickets, she didn't see me."

He had fallen behind considerably, and was not a little alarmed to find that she had suddenly turned the next corner, and disappeared.

Quickening his pace he arrived at the spot, and to his relief descried her in the distance. A few moments later she ascended a pair of steps, and entered a house.

"So, dot is vare mine beauty lives? Sare goot! I shall try to sell her somedings after aviles."

He now began to enter, in a systematic way, every house on the square, and made strenuous efforts to sell his wares. Not meeting with flattering success, he gradually approached the point of interest he constantly had in view.

Entering the side gate, he made his way to the back yard, where he expected to find the hired help, and to his apparent delight he encountered a blooming German girl busily engaged in washing some clothing.

He stood watching her vigorous motions as if fascinated by the picture, and when she suddenly looked up from her work there was an idiotic grin on his countenance that the girl attributed to speechless admiration.

She blushed most becomingly, and made an effort to pull down her sleeves a trifle.

"Don't do dot," said the other, earnestly, advanc-

ing a step. "Forgif me, but you look shust like a picture, und a very handsome von at dot."

There was considerable of the coquette in the girl despite her unromantic occupation.

"You don'd must talk to me dot vay."

"Und vy should I not, ven I tells der troot?"

"Vat do you vant here?"

The German gave his pack a rattle.

"I'm after der pennies. May I not sell you somedings?"

"No."

"May I not gif you somedings?" with what was intended for a most charming smile.

"Vat?"

"A kiss!"

The girl was surprised for a moment out of her adopted tongue, and answered in unnistakable, half-angry German:

"Nein!"

"Ach, mine gracious! mine gracious! Nine of 'em. Von is more than I expected, but I'll take 'em," and dropping his wares he smacked his lips with great gusto, extended his arms, and made a rush at his buxom charmer.

At that moment another servant, attracted by the noise, came to the door, and looked with surprise, then amusement, at the scene; but the awkward foreigner, detected in his intended treat, dropped his arms to his side, and looked down in confusion.

"Go ahead, Dutchy," said the spectator, flipantly; "I want to see the circus. Katrina won't hurt you."

But "Dutchy" apparently had enough, for he went slowly back to his tins and his buckets.

Katrina, suddenly emboldened by the presence of

a third party, even went so far as to approach the peddler, and offer her assistance in rearranging his stock.

"No, you can gif me no hellup," he said, sullenly.

Katrina laughed good-naturedly.

"If at first you don'd git along, dry, dry again. Ain't dot it?"

The man's eyes brightened.

"Dot vas so. Shall I come to-night?"

"If you vant to. Don't tell nobody, dough," she said, in an undertone.

After a few more whispered words the pack seemed in its normal condition, and with an awkward bow to his adored and the laughing female standing in the doorway, the peddler made the best of his way to the street.

That night, shortly after dusk, the figure of the vender of tinware might have been seen skulking about the back yard in the alley.

He had not been there many minutes, however, when the gate was cautiously opened by the fair Katrina, and "Yawcob," as he called himself, was admitted.

She was the only one of the kitchen help who was at home that evening, and was consequently able to take her new found acquaintance to that part of the house.

Yawcob soon found himself installed in a comfortable chair, while Katrina sat near and entertained him in the best way of which she was capable. It would probably not be interesting to relate all of their conversation, or even to detail it in their peculiar style of utterance, but such facts as properly belong to our story are now given.

"You enjoy living here?"

"Oh, yes; I have been here a long time, and my mistress treats me well."

"What is her name?"

"Miss Trainer."

"Young?"

"Yes."

"Handsome?"

It would be difficult to describe Katrina's expression at this question.

"A wonderfully pretty woman. I never saw one like her."

"Does she have much company?"

"A great deal; and how they all enjoy themselves with their games!"

"Has she a notion of getting married?"

"It doesn't seem so, although she has a great many admirers."

"Who seem to be favorites with her?" and the heart of the questioner began to beat a trifle faster.

"That is hard for me to tell, as I was never present at any of their frivolities, but I have heard the other servants talk, and they seem to think that two men who are mostly always together seem to have the preference."

"Don't you remember their names?"

"No; I never thought enough about them, and I know my mistress wouldn't have me discuss her private affairs. If she heard of such a thing I wouldn't get to stay here long."

"All right, then; we won't talk about her. Who was that pretty girl who was watching us to-day?"

Katrina felt piqued at the praise bestowed upon a fellow servant, and quickly changed the subject, coming back of her own accord to her mistress.

"I saw one of those two men once. He was young and very handsome, and he spoke to me."

"When was he here last?" in his turn showing symptoms of the green-eyed monster.

"Two or three weeks ago, but," with a mournful shake of her head, "he will come no more."

"Why? Did she give him the mitten?"

"Oh, no! I have heard that he is dead. He was killed in some bank robbery."

"And you have never seen him since?"

"Of course not; how could I when he is dead?"

It was evident, then, that unless the girl was in collusion with her mistress, a fact which, under the circumstances, seemed very improbable, Theo, if alive, had never been brought into that house; he must be sought elsewhere.

"Does the other man still come?"

"Sometimes, but I have never seen him."

Suddenly Yawcob leaped to his feet, apparently terror-stricken.

"Some von is comin'," he said, in stage whispers, "vare shall we hide?"

Katrina hesitated a moment, as if wishing to investigate for herself, but the peddler pushed her toward a cupboard which he noticed was fastened with a catch, and a strong one at that.

"Let's get in the cupboard," he urged. "No one will see us there," and without further ceremony he pushed her in.

Producing a murderous looking knife about a foot long from some mysterious portion of his anatomy, he brandished it before her frightened vision.

"Katrina," he remarked, solemnly, "vill you lif or die?"

The girl would have sunk on her knees had the contracted space permitted.

"Oh, let me lif! Vat haf I done to you?"

"Vat haf you not done? I shall murder him!" the utmost malignity depicted on his ugly countenance.

"Vat mean you?" almost ready to faint with terror as the dreaded knife came dangerously near her.

"You haf a lover concealed somevares in this house. Vos dos not so?"

"Ah, no. You mistake; dere is none."

But Yawcob was not satisfied.

"You shust must stay in there until I shall look for mine selluf. So hellup me gracious, if you move before I come back, I shall you split from head to der foot mit mine knife."

The girl, certain that he would find no rival of hers in the building, joyfully gave her promise not to stir until he came back, in hope that his terrible knife would be taken away; so shutting the door with a snap that showed the prisoner would be able to get out only with outside assistance, Yawcob replaced his weapon, and cautiously took his stand at the entrance to the dining-room.

There he waited for some indication on the part of Katrina to break out of her prison, but finding everything quiet in that quarter, he proceeded on his tour of exploration.

CHAPTER XV.

SCHEMING FOR A FORTUNE.

Another solitary and gloomy day had passed with the prisoner in the old stone house.

Sorrowfully, for want of something better to do, he watched the daylight peep through the little chink overhead, now timidly in the early dawn, now more boldly at the noontime, and then die away altogether at the coming of night.

No more terrible punishment can be inflicted upon a man than to place him in solitary confinement, with no means to pass away the time except in communion with his own thoughts.

Toward evening of this day, however, Clell, who seemed to have been constituted his guardian, came into the room, and said:

"Stark wishes to see you."

"Well, bring him in."

"He can't come."

"Is he sick?"

"He isn't able to walk; guess he's about on his last legs. Anyhow, he wants you to go to him."

"Very well, I'm ready."

"But you must have these handcuffs put on you."

Theo submitted for the sake of his friend, and was then led up the dark stairs and along the hall, at the end of which they paused before a door.

When they entered the room Theo was horrified to observe the sunken cheeks and generally debilitated condition of his friend.

The light was dim, and the young man was not able to see distinctly, but it was evident that, judging from Stark's appearance, he was not long for this world. He was lying on a rough cot in the corner, moaning feebly as Theo entered, but he half arose from his recumbent position as he noticed his visitor.

"Theo, I am rejoiced to see you. I didn't expect to meet you again."

"Are the fiends still resolved to starve you into submission?" asked Theo, as he started toward the bedside.

Clell stepped in front of him.

"You are near enough, my friend. Talk where you are," and with that admonition he retired to the door.

"They have brought me to terms at last," said Stark, feebly. "I have starved too long already, and am finally forced to tell you what they require of me."

"Don't hesitate," said Howard, warmly. "You know I urged you to tell me all the last time I saw you."

"But you have no idea how much it will humiliate me to say a word. Oh, I cannot!"

"You must tell me everything these men want. I take it that they require a sacrifice from me, and even should I think myself unable to make it, the mere statement of their demands will do no harm."

Stark hesitated, but as if making up his mind to get through as soon as possible with a most disagreeable task, he began hurriedly:

"You owe me some money."

"I believe I do; some twenty-five or thirty dollars."

"These men, in order to legitimize a robbery, wish that debt to be increased to a hundred thousand dollars."

Theo stared at the sick man as if he believed him crazy.

"How do they know that I owe you anything?" an indefinite suspicion entering his mind for the first time.

Stark smiled sadly.

"Where was that debt incurred?"

"At the Queen's, of course. I borrowed the money from you there. Ah, I believe I see your point; you mean to infer that she witnessed the transaction, and reported it to these men, who are keeping within the letter of the law by making me pay my debts, yet increasing them a thousand fold. They are very conscientious concerning other people's obligations."

"Of course it is a mere whim. They would have made the same demand anyhow."

"I understand that; now tell me in what way you are concerned in this matter."

"That is the humiliating part of it for me."

"But you must not hesitate on that account."

"Very well, I will not; you are heir to a hundred thousand dollars."

Theo gave vent to a whistle of surprise.

"I'll believe that when I see the money."

"I guess it is true. I wish you were as certain of getting it as you are of being justly entitled to it."

"How do you know of this fact, if fact it is?"

"These men have told me."

"And they expect to get the money through you?"

"That is the state of affairs exactly."

"They have starved you into asking me to pay you all this money?"

"Yes."

"And then they will pocket it?"

Stark nodded.

"Why don't they starve me into signing it over to them?"

"I suppose they think you would die first."

"A correct supposition. But they imagine that in

order to save my friend's life I would part with all my money?"

"That seems to be their idea."

"A most ingenious plot, truly. How am I to make this over to you?"

Clell here interposed.

"Here is the document you are required to sign," said he, presenting a paper.

Howard seized it, and glanced over the contents, which were after this style, with the omission of the date:

"For value received, one month after date, I promise to pay Julian Stark, or order, one hundred thousand dollars, without interest."

A blank space was left for the filling in of Theo's name.

"How are you to get the money, Julian?"

"Oh, I'll never get it. You see I'm to fill out an order to pay the above amount to some one, say Irene Trainer, who will take care that it is collected before we are allowed our liberty. Of course, when once they get the money into their hands, they will have no further use for us."

"This has been a splendid venture for us all around," said Theo, bitterly.

"Yes, and I am afraid it has been all my fault. Of course I have lost everything, but I had no particularly happy future to look forward to like you, and hence may be said to have lost less."

"You are aware as to how it happened?"

"Oh, yes; such villains couldn't rest without rehearsing the details of the plot to me."

"But what became of Scott?"

"He is likewise detained as a prisoner, for they know they wouldn't be safe a moment were one of

us to be at large; so you, he, and I will be held until their plans are consummated."

"They had better make an end of me instead of freeing me," said Theo, significantly. "If ever I escape from this place I'll devote my whole life to bringing the criminals to justice before one of them shall escape."

Stark sighed.

"I am too far gone to think of vengeance, but wickedness will not go unpunished long."

Clell thought it best to interfere at this juncture.

"See here; you fellows have talked about long enough to have settled that matter by this time. Have you persuaded him to save your life, Stark?"

"I have not asked him," replied the latter, with simple dignity.

"Better hurry up then," said Clell, brutally.

Stark glanced pitifully at Howard, and then looked away.

Theo stood motionless, absorbing the immensity of the plot, and the importance of the step he was asked to take. At that moment came the astounding thought: "What has Stark ever done for me to deserve such a sacrifice at my hands?"

Had it not been for him he would never have seen Irene Trainer or experienced the misfortunes that had followed her acquaintance; had it not been for him he would not be penniless now, and in absolute danger of death.

He, however, put such thoughts aside manfully.

"If I have been weak enough to forget my manhood, to allow myself to be duped, then I, and no one else, must take the consequences." Then aloud, "A fortune has no weight in my eyes when it will

stand between a man and death; I will sign the paper."

"Good!" said the robber, starting for the door; "I'll call the witnesses."

"Hold!" said Theo, quietly; "there is no hurry for my signature. Besides, I shall not sign this instrument blindly for any one. You must acquaint me with some of the particulars of the mysterious fortune that has fallen to me. In the meantime see that my friend's wants are supplied; then tell me the story of the fortune."

"You will remember your promise?" said Clell, doubtingly.

"Only too well."

"Then come with me."

Theo was led back to his place of confinement, and there left by the redoubtable Clell, with the information that a lady would appear shortly and acquaint him with such particulars as she would deem necessary.

"Remember, too," was the careless answer, "that if the signature is withheld our mutual friend is liable to kick the bucket any time."

And with this comforting insinuation the gruff fellow took his departure. A minute later he was again in the presence of Stark.

The latter was busily engaged in washing his face of the paint and other subterfuges that had deceived the victim, and Clell watched him in admiration.

"A good make-up, Bob. It would deceive most any one, especially where the light is the least bit dim."

"I flatter myself that it was a success, but I was mortally afraid that the young gentleman in his

sympathy would get closer to me than was necessary. If he had he would have made a discovery most fatal to us, for he has the eyes of a hawk."

"Suppose he had; wouldn't he still be willing to sign in order to save his own life? A man, when it comes to a pinch, will do almost anything to stave off death."

"Not so with Howard. I must say that while he has been blinded in this matter by his friendship for me, he is of an unusually penetrating and superior as well as determined mind. He would never, under such circumstances as these, submit were the punishment directed toward himself instead of some one else."

"I wonder what keeps the Queen to-night."

"There she is now; I hear her at the door."

The next moment Irene Trainer entered the apartment.

"How go things?" she inquired, gayly. "Is our handsome prisoner as refractory as ever?"

"No, he has at last given in."

"Good! Has he yet signed the paper?"

"No; he refuses to do so until he has had the particulars of the way in which the fortune came to him."

"Has that been done?"

"No; we have decided to leave that pleasant part of the programme to you."

"Most excellent judgment and forethought! Shall I give him a straight story, or will it be best to interperse the truth with a pleasant bit of fiction. He'll never get out of this place to cause any trouble."

"Don't be too sure of that. It begins to look comparatively safe now, but we must not take it for

granted that we shall have plain sailing henceforth."

"What can stop us now from accomplishing our purposes? Howard's body has been discovered, and is forever under ground; not a trace of the robbers exists; how can we be molested?"

"Belton is on the trail."

"Trying to get on it, you mean? There is quite a difference."

"Maybe now; but there is a likelihood of less difference soon with him at work."

"Well, go on, and let us get through with this business; we are both needed in town to-night; the gang is getting up a new scheme to be entered upon just as soon as this matter is fixed up."

"Oh, no; we'll wait until your return with the money before we leave this house."

"Very well; then I'll go at once to Howard, and to him a tale unfold that will make each particular hair stand on end."

CHAPTER XVI.

BELTON ON THE TRAIL.

Belton was in a new and dangerous locality, but he felt no fear.

He had been in many a more dangerous situation, and he knew that while the mistress would probably shoot him on sight should she find him prowling about the premises, he was yet willing to take all risk in the matter.

The next room was dark, but beyond it he saw the glimmer of a light.

Cautiously advancing, he soon found himself in a sitting-room dimly illuminated, but unoccupied.

Here he paused again to listen for any possible noise in the kitchen or elsewhere.

He could hear the movement of a person in the room overhead, and at once concluded to reach that point.

Beside the room he was occupying ran a hall in which commenced a flight of stairs.

He made his way immediately, but in a perfectly noiseless manner, to the foot of the stairs, and began the ascent. When half way up he heard the murmur of voices, but could not distinguish the tones or the words.

He at last had reached the top without the faintest indication of a sound to show his presence. A small room stood on a level with the landing, and by the side of this was a larger apartment, in which were seated a man and a woman engaged in a low conversation.

"I must hear what they are saying," he muttered, "and I can't evidently get into that room. Now, how shall I arrange the affair?"

Where he was standing he could see not the persons but their reflection in a mirror.

Had they been facing the mirror, they, in like manner, would have been able to see his image.

The window nearest the smaller room he could see was raised somewhat; could he reach it from the outside he would be able to hear almost everything they said.

He stepped past the half open door into the little room, and the next moment had raised the window.

Peering outside he was rejoiced to find that each of the lower windows had a projecting cap sufficiently large to stand upon, could he but reach it.

The next point was to place himself in the desired

situation. Slipping through the window before which he had been standing, he poised himself on that particular ledge, and then reaching out sideways, he managed to catch hold of the shutter of the next window.

Allowing himself to swing like a pendulum, his feet struck the edge below and remained there.

He now grasped the sill of the desired window, and peeped in to see whether he had made sufficient noise to be heard. In doing this he took a risk, as indeed had been the case all the evening, for the reason that he might be seen at any moment.

In order to obviate this difficulty, he decided on a bold stroke.

Seizing one of the shutters, he closed it with a bang, at the same time lowering his head so as not to be seen should the couple look up.

They did look up, but with the remark by the gentleman that he thought a storm must be coming up, they continued their conversation with no further attention to the incident.

The detective was now in a position to hear if not to see, and he applied his ear assiduously to the task of finding out just what the subject of their conversation was.

His position was not so comfortable as he might have wished, but he cared not for that so long as he was in hopes of making any discovery.

However, in spite of his exertions, it seemed that he was doomed to disappointment, for he could catch a word only here and there, although one question and its answer set him thinking.

"Suppose he will not give in?"

"Then we must try the starving process on him;

I have starved myself too long for such barren results."

"Now, what in the name of all the virtues," mused the perplexed detective, "does that mean? Of course it must refer to Howard; but why has Stark, who doesn't look as if he had been depriving himself of the necessities of life, been starving, and why do they propose to starve Howard? The first part is of course a hoax, but the second may be only too true. Now, what is their game? The bank robbery is only a portion of some gigantic scheme of which Howard appears to be the central figure. Now, let's listen again."

"I am afraid to trust you," said the Queen.

"Why should you be?" said Stark, angrily.

"If you ever get the money into your hands I shall never see you again."

"Well, how do you propose to remedy the matter?"

"By going with you."

"Nonsense! Do you wish to spoil the whole game by your unworthy suspicions? It would be an impossibility for you, Jim, and myself to leave this place together. I have no doubt Belton has his eye on us all the time, and if we were both to leave, he would be on hand to follow us, despite our precautions."

"How about a disguise?"

"Of course I shall go disguised, but for three to attempt it would but treble the risk. Why don't you be reasonable, and trust me?"

"Ah, Robert! you're too sharp by half. Why won't I trust you? Simply because I won't, and if you should attempt to go by yourself, I think I could whisper a word to our inquisitive friend, Belton, for

which that gentleman would doubtless be thankful to me the remainder of his life. Now, try it if you wish to."

Their tones were now dropped almost to a whisper, and Belton, despite his acute hearing, was forced to acknowledge that he could not catch a single word, and as his position had become next to intolerable, he began to cast about him for a safe and noiseless descent to the ground, when a succession of piercing screams rang through the house.

The plotters sprang to their feet in alarm, and rushed down stairs to investigate the cause of the outcry, while Belton, grasping the edge of the window cap, swung off, and dropped to the earth, some fifteen feet below. A moment later he was outside of the gate.

In the meantime Stark and Irene had hurriedly proceeded to the kitchen, where they found Katrina still uttering her shrieks of terror.

Finding that a simple question as to what ailed her was not sufficient to obtain a reply of any kind, Stark seized a bucket of water, and dashed the contents in the girl's face.

The remedy was certainly effective, for she suddenly exclaimed, after a gulp of surprise at the unexpected deluge:

"Oh, is he gone?"

"Is who gone, you lunatic?" said Stark, sternly. "Explain the meaning of all this caterwauling."

"Ach! I haf been so frightened. I tought I vas should been kilt."

"Who was going to kill you?"

"A big mans, oh, so big," her eyes swelling again with terror as she thought of that dreadful weapon, "und he had a knife so long, und I tought my throat

was cut already," feeling a little doubtful over the question even yet.

"Little difference if your head had been cut off instead of so small a matter as your throat," said the Queen, harshly. "What did he do?"

The servant Kate, who had witnessed the flirtation of the morning, was present, and now interposed.

"I found her shut up in that cupboard, Miss Trainer, perfectly gray with fright, and when I opened the door she fell to screaming just as you heard her."

"I tought it vas der mans," insisted the girl, with a shudder, in extenuation of her offense. "I tought he vas comin' back to kill me."

"How did you get in that cupboard?"

"He put me in and den fastened der door."

"What did he then do?" with a glance significant of alarm at Stark.

"Ach, I vas so scart I know nottings, but I tink he went into der dining-room."

"Let us search, then!" cried Irene, hastily. "He may yet be in the building, and if he is, it will not do to allow him to get away so easily."

But if she expected to catch the intruder, she was certainly disappointed, for not a single trace of his presence could be found.

Had not the terror of the German girl been so apparent, the plotters would have been forced to believe that she had been imposed upon by her imagination.

"Well, what do you think of it?" said Irene, in despair.

"It must have been Belton, and it is possible that

he has heard every word of our conversation. If he has, good-by to our schemes."

"But I can't believe that it was he. It was a German, for Katrina surely could not be deceived by any clumsy imitation such as Belton could not help giving."

"Do not lay too much stress upon the chances of a clumsy imitation by such a person as this detective. It seems to me that he is anything but clumsy. Yet we can do nothing but proceed with our plans and await his move. If something doesn't turn up before a day, he, in my opinion, will be just a few hours too late to be of any service to the other side. Let me adjust my disguise and go."

Ten minutes later a man with a heavy beard walked out at the back gate, and disappeared down the alley.

At the same moment a German walked rapidly past the house in the same direction. Half a square away he ran against an Irish laborer, who was apparently occupied in looking at the moon as it played at hide and seek with the clouds.

"Oxcuse me," said the former, "I vas not see not-tings as I comes oop."

"No, I guess not, but begob, if ye don't watch out ye'll see stars nixt toime, bad luck to yer ugly pictures."

As the German disengaged himself from the Irishman, who was inclined to stand on his dignity as well as assume a belligerent attitude, he whispered, hastily:

"Stark's just left—went down the alley—big brown beard—follow."

CHAPTER XVII.

BELTON'S INTERVIEW WITH IRENE.

"Now," remarked the German to himself, "I think I shall hold an interview with the fair chambermaid who bamboozled me so nicely last night. Maybe she'll do it again, but I shall not forego the pleasure of a private confab with her, even with that staring me in the face as a necessary consequence."

He was not in a hurry about carrying out his intentions, however, for he made no motion to approach the house, although it is safe to say that no movement of any importance was made about the premises which he did not see.

At last he seemed to think that the time had arrived for action; he walked boldly up to the gate, opened it, and approached the window.

Irene was seated in the parlor, but for once the sound of gayety was not heard—she was alone.

"Now's my time," he said, grimly, as he noticed that she was engaged in running over the keys of the piano in a desultory manner.

Stepping on tiptoe, he cautiously opened the front door, and slipped up stairs. A hasty glance into a suite of bedrooms determined his choice.

He selected the best furnished, and coolly disappeared under the bed.

After a half hour's waiting, he heard a step on the stairway, but as it passed on to another room he concluded it must be one of the servants.

A few minutes later another step was heard, and this time he knew his intended victim was coming,

for she entered the room humming the air she had been playing a few minutes before.

"Heigho!" she exclaimed, as she threw herself into a chair after locking the door, "I wonder if I'll get any sleep to-night? I shall not allow Katrina's German friend to disturb my slumbers, anyhow, if I can help it. I believe I shall be obliged to discharge that girl for her blundering work."

After a few minutes spent in idle musing she made a movement to take down her hair, when Belton concluded it best to begin his contemplated interview. He arose so noiselessly from behind the bed that Irene did not see him until she heard his words.

"Goot efening, Mees Trainer. I hope I shall see you well."

The girl did not scream. She was made of sterner stuff, even if her lovely features gave no indication of the reckless courage underneath that beautiful exterior.

It is true that her lips grew pale, but she did not tremble; and the detective was never in greater danger in his life than when he stood in her presence at that moment.

"Do you want anything?"

"Yaw, I shall tink I vas vant somedings before I have this place left; can you gif them?"

"I might give you something; yes," very significantly, "but it may not be just what you want."

"Anyding vould be acceptable from dose lofely hands. Ah, shust like mine Katrina's hands," as he came nearer.

"So you are the gentleman who entered my house to-night and frightened your lovely Katrina into a fit."

"Yaw, I am dot same, and Yawcob is my name. I vas so mad mit her dot I shut her up in der cupboard. I tought she had anoder mans in der house, und I vas find him."

"You say you found him?"

"Nein. I vas dry to found him. But I find him not."

"Have you been in the house ever since?" advancing a few steps, a deadly gleam in her eye.

"Yaw, I been here all der same dimes," with the most innocent look in his calm orbs.

"Do you know I don't believe you are a German at all?"

"Ish dot so? Vell, vat do you tink I been?"

"An Irishman!"

The German's jaw dropped in alarm, as if he thought she was crazy.

"Maybe dot vas der name of the oder mans. Did y ou see him?"

"No, but you are no German."

The man seemed to be greatly amused, and began to exhibit symptoms of a laughing fit; first he shook all over as if he were afflicted with the ague; then a wheezy sound issued from his vocal apparatus, followed by the long-repressed laugh.

Unfortunately it was cut short in its prime, as we might say, for Irene, with a swift motion, drew a dirk that was concealed at her side, and sprang at him with murderous intent.

Had he not been watching her like a hawk, despite his apparent carelessness, he would never have lived to tell the story.

As the knife descended he quietly seized her by the arm, and held her like a vise.

"Drop it!"

She did not move.

"Drop it!" with a significant pressure on her arm. The weapon fell to the floor.

"Now," with frightful good humor, "you will allow me to finish mine laugh. I must not be interrupted dot vay."

Suiting the action to the word, he burst out into such a hearty guffaw that Irene would have joined him had she not been furious with rage.

"How is my pretty chambermaid to-night, anyhow," he asked, with a broad smile.

Every trace of the German had disappeared.

"Oh, I knew it was you," she said, quickly.

"Merely suspected it, you mean."

"What have you come for?"

"To show you that I am on your trail and still live."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Of course not, but let me advise you in regard to one thing, don't hereafter try any disguises on me. Minneapolis is too small a city for that. It might work all right in New York, where there are thousands of criminals, but never here. As a proof, see how quickly I located you."

"I still fail to grasp your meaning."

"I don't doubt it in the least. I don't expect you to acknowledge your crime, but I want to warn you that your present plots will never succeed. I want to show you that it will be useless to take further steps toward their consummation."

"What do you know?"

"Oh, well, some things I know, and some I don't; but do not trust Julian Stark out of your sight a moment."

"And pray what terrible thing is Julian Stark

about to do that concerns me?" spoken with a non-chalant smile.

"When he gets his fingers on that money you may freely give your share as a donation to the church you attend."

Irene looked him squarely in the face with not a quiver of mouth or eye.

"An enigma! What strange and welcome piece of good fortune has happened to him now?"

"You know as well as I."

"Perhaps better. And you think I can't trust him?"

"That is exactly what I said, and mean, too."

"I'll never believe that!" she cried, with spirit. "Julian false to me? Impossible!"

Belton laughed complacently, and yet with a look of admiration.

"You are a strange woman, Miss Trainer, but a most able one. I'd give a thousand dollars to have as efficient a confederate on the detective force."

"I don't understand you," she said, in perplexed innocence.

The detective knew he was wasting time in attempting to gain information of any kind from her, and he determined to leave.

"Oh, well, I guess you will never understand; so, having finished my errand, I might as well take my departure," and with that remark he arose.

"Won't you explain your meaning?" she asked, with a troubled look. "If Julian is false to me I ought to know it. What have you ascertained about him?"

"That I must not say."

"But remember, if he is contemplating any treachery, that I am in a position to frustrate his move-

ments by exposing what I know of certain matters with which I am more or less intimately connected."

"He is merely using you as a tool."

"As a confederate, you should say."

"Then you will acknowledge that you are making the attempt to gain a fortune that belongs to some one else."

"Suppose we are; and you know to whom?"

"Certainly; to Theo Howard."

"And Theo Howard left no relatives," with a quickly drawn breath that did not escape Belton; he knew more than she suspected.

"None, so far as I know. Your plan is to have Stark obtain this money, and on his return share it with you; but you will never live to see or hear of his return."

Her eyes flashed strangely.

"How do you know?"

"Simply because it is part of their plan. You are in the gang only in an incidental sort of way."

The last shot went home, and she allowed him to see it.

"Perhaps you can tell me how you heard all this?"

"Clell is the fellow who gave it away in my hearing, but not intentionally, of course."

Her countenance fell again.

"You know Clell?"

"Oh, yes; in a casual sort of manner."

Irene arose.

"Mr. Belton, I attempted to murder you to-night."

"Yes."

"I would gladly have accomplished the deed had I not been frustrated."

"You certainly would have done so."

"I am rejoiced now that you were not killed."

"You ought to be very thankful."

"I am willing to make reparation."

"I am afraid you are moving too fast for a thorough reformation, my good woman."

"Oh, you don't understand me, sir; I don't call it a reformation. All I want is proof of Stark's perfidy, and I assure you I will not hesitate to reveal all I know. Can you give me such proofs? If so, come down stairs with me, and with a bottle of wine between us, we will doubtless be able to arrive at an understanding."

"Oh, yes; I'll go with you, but there must be no little games played on me, such as you attempted last evening."

"Certainly not until I hear what you have to say."

Irene's manner was most cordial and earnest, but the detective made no pretense of trusting her. He followed her, however, and at last stood beside her in one of the lower rooms.

She now faced him at the distance of a yard.

"What will happen to me should I give you such information as you desire regarding this matter?"

"Of course you will not be molested."

"My life would not be safe unless the whole gang were captured."

"Then we must make arrangements to capture the whole gang. Are you willing to render our descent upon them completely successful?"

There was a perplexed look on Irene's face, and her foot moved restlessly about over the floor.

"Yes," she said at last, with a smile, "I am ready to make your descent completely successful."

As she uttered the last word there was a perceptible click, and before Belton could make a move that

portion of the floor on which he was standing sank beneath him.

He made a wild clutch at the floor as he fell, and succeeded in grasping it with the tips of his fingers.

Had he not been molested he might have raised himself from his dangerous position; but Irene stood above him smiling triumphantly.

"Outwitted again, and by a woman! Fie upon such detective skill!"

"I've one consolation left anyhow," remarked the imperturbable detective.

"What is that, my easily satisfied friend?"

"That if I have been outwitted by a woman, it was done by a mighty handsome one."

"Is that all you have to say?"

"All except that I want you to let me out, for I can't hold on much longer."

"Very well; when you can't hold on any longer, just let go. It is not very far down, and the sooner you drop the sooner all will be over."

"Won't you tell me what it is like down here?"

"Well, you are a cool one! But I must allow you to find out by experience. In the meantime, be sure not to frighten Katrina so badly upon your next visit, and don't fail to report your success to-night upon your arrival at headquarters."

Here Belton made a determined effort to raise himself, but Irene struck him a cruel blow on the temple with a wine bottle she seized from the table that stood near.

With a groan the detective's hold loosened, and he fell into the black, awful space beneath.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DETECTIVE'S ESCAPE.

It seemed to Belton that he fell hundreds of feet before he stopped, but the uncertainty of what was in store for him was the most horrible of all to bear.

The sensation of ice cold water was the first reminder that he had fallen into a deep well. Down he sank into its frigid depths with a momentum that must have carried him to the bottom, but a few moments later he had arisen to the surface.

Although he could see nothing, he knew his position must be well nigh hopeless. The fact was that in falling he had but one chance in a hundred of escape from instant death, but that one chance had come to him, and he was yet alive.

Had he not descended in an upright posture his head would certainly have struck on the side of the well, and unconsciousness, followed by drowning, would have been the inevitable result.

"Yes, my descent has been perfectly successful, not perhaps so much as the fair young Queen would have desired, but doubtless it will end just the same, for I can't stand it much longer in this freezing water."

His hands came in contact with the smooth wall in his search for a projection by which to raise himself.

"She has done it well; alas, too well, for my prolonged sojourn on earth; but while there is life I'll nose around for hope; and, by my good stars, I have, I believe, found something more substantial than hope!"

His last remark was called forth by the discovery of a break in the wall. He concluded at once that a portion of the wall had fallen in at one time, and his next movement was to find out whether the niche or recess thus formed were sufficiently large for him to creep into it.

He had great difficulty, however, in making the experiment, for the dirt continually fell under his grasp, and he realized with horror that his strength was beginning to fail.

One last determined effort raised him so that he could seat himself in the recess by holding on to the ragged bricks around him; but even in this position he was still partly in the water, and liable to slip in again wholly at any moment.

Suddenly he bethought himself, with a smile, of the weapon that had frightened the blooming Katrina into hysterics, and seizing it with an eagerness that showed how exuberant his hopes had suddenly become, he began to dig in the dirt behind him with the result that in less than five minutes he had enlarged the niche sufficiently to seat himself therein with comparative comfort.

"Now, my beautiful Queen, I rather think I shall have another whack at life and the Fidelity Bank robbers. I am sorry to have spoiled your pretty scheme, but I guess it's spoiled. She'll be down in the cellar in a jiffy to see if I have kicked the bucket, so I think I shall try to blind her. There's a small bit of a board that kept knocking about me in the water, and I shall simply place my hat upon it. When she comes she'll see my headgear floating around, and, of course, she'd be very dull of comprehension if she didn't at once conclude that my body was at the bottom; but she will not investigate until the arch plotter, Julian Stark or Bob Younger, who, in my opinion, are identical, comes to help her. By that time I expect to be somewhere else."

Scarcely had he finished his task when he saw the dim reflection of a light on the floor overhead.

He now withdrew himself into the niche, and awaited events.

He could see that the light was being held over the mouth of the well, for its rays now fell on the surface of the water, and brought into perspicuity the hat which was floating lazily about.

For full five minutes the person remained without moving, then slowly withdrew, leaving Belton once more in darkness.

"Now for liberty!" he cried, edging around so as to face the opening, and then began digging in the earth like a fiend.

At each lunge the mass of earth thus loosened fell into the water with a splash, and he laughingly calculated how many splashes it would be necessary to make before he could find his way out.

As he ascended, the atmosphere about him grew dense and heavy until his brain became so benumbed that he found it impossible to work longer just then. He accordingly descended to the bottom of the opening, and secured a fresh breath, after which he went at his task with the same vehemence.

"Upward and onward!" he exclaimed, in fury; but he was again and again compelled to leave his work for the precious boon of a little oxygen, although he returned as often with just the same determination.

He knew not how long he worked with the same untiring energy that had marked his initial efforts, but when he felt that soon he must cease in order to recuperate his strength, his knife struck against a stone.

"All for naught!" he cried, in despair, almost tempted to cast his weapon aside, but on sober second thought he continued his work.

A broad surface of rock was exposed, completely covering the hole in which he was standing.

"I must be confounded near the top," he muttered. "Anyhow, let us see whether it is movable or otherwise."

Placing his head against it he pushed upward with what force he was able to use under the circumstances. It moved!

"Heaven be praised!" he exclaimed, in thankfulness. "I am saved again!"

Raising one end he found that he had reached the surface of the ground, and was thus able to breathe freely without changing his position.

Listening intently, while he drank in the grateful draughts, for any sound that might indicate the presence of a foe, he concluded that he was the only

occupant of the cellar, and with a steady effort he pushed up the stone, which he found to be thin and flat, until it stood upon its edge.

He now stepped out, and allowed it to fall back into its place.

Belton always carried a box of matches about with him for any emergency that might arise.

Pulling them out of an inside pocket, he was rejoiced to find them in perfect condition; and lighting one he immediately set to work removing all traces of the loose dirt about the stone.

"Now for my final exit!"

With the aid of another match he discovered that the cellar was walled up to the very floor, which was some ten feet from the ground.

With not an opening of any kind in the four walls that inclosed it, this apartment seemed to have been constructed for the very use to which it had been put this very night.

"How many men have lost their lives in this infernal hole?" he muttered. "It seems that in a certain sense I have jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire, and not that either, for that well is anything but a frying-pan. However, it amounts to about the same thing, as I can see no way of escape, and the lovely Irene will doubtless have her own sweet way in the end. By the by, it must be close to morning, judging from the sensations of hunger and weakness that are beginning to affect me. My watch has stopped, and not a chink in the wall to show whether or not day has come; but I'll go to work at once, for I ought to have been out of this place long since. Ah, I have it!"

He had bethought himself suddenly of the small pieces of timber that are nailed between the joists of floors to hold them in position; a rope thrown over one of these would enable him to climb up and unfasten the trap. From that point his escape would be easy, provided he were not discovered.

In an instant his coat was off and torn into two pieces. These he tied together, and now attempted to throw over the timber mentioned.

A score of such attempts proved futile, but it was life or death to him, and he preferred life.

At last he was successful; a strain on his improvised rope showed him that it would answer the purpose admirably.

A minute later he had touched the trap, and it dropped noiselessly into the cellar, supported on one side by the hinges that held it.

His danger was not over yet by any means, as he would be obliged to ascend immediately over the mouth of the well, but he had come through so many perils unscathed that this seemed but a small matter to him. Removing every trace of his presence, so that his enemies would not know that he had been in the cellar at all, he stood on the very edge of the well, and making a leap into the air, he succeeded in grasping the side of the trap as it hung downward.

Inch by inch he ascended, and soon his head was on a level with the floor. Another effort, and he stood on his feet.

A few moments sufficed to raise the trap to its former position.

It was yet dark, but Belton knew that it was the darkness that immediately preceded the dawn, and he tarried not.

"Once more, fair Queen," he murmured, as he stood hatless and coatless on the deserted street, and took a parting look at the dwelling from which he had so lately escaped, "once more I offer you greeting. I've been freed from your web twice, but I must not tempt fate much further. My web has just been begun, and I think it is now my turn to do the catching."

When Belton arrived at the office it was four o'clock.

Jones was waiting for him, and when that worthy saw the condition of his superior, he burst into a laugh that was not altogether free from alarm.

"What's the matter? Been through a threshing machine?"

"Oh, no," quietly. "I'll tell you after you've given me your report."

Jones looked decidedly gloomy.

"I haven't much of a report to give."

"Didn't you see your man?"

"Yes, I caught on to him, and shadowed him for half an hour, but he suddenly disappeared, and not a trace of him could I find."

"Never mind; we'll get on their trail sooner than they think. Now, Miss Trainer, Mr. Bob Younger, and the rest of you, look out, for I'm after you like a sleuth-hound."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE QUEEN'S STORY.

A knock at the door, followed by the words in feminine tones, "May I come in?"

Without waiting for permission, however, the lady entered, and stood before Theo.

"Aren't you glad to see me?" she asked, mockingly.

"If you bring me freedom."

"I do on certain conditions. In short, I have come to tell you a story. This task was left to me, doubtless, on account of my superior culture in language."

"Most likely on account of your ability to make it as bitter as possible in the telling."

"Granted. Now it is agreed that you are to give your signature to a certain document when you have heard the facts which I am about to relate."

"Yes, provided I am satisfied of its truth."

"Well, it will be true. Shall I begin?"

"Yes."

"A gentleman, whom I shall call Bob Younger, was walking along the streets of Chicago in an obscure portion of the town.

"He was there merely on a visit, and having no errand to occupy his attention, he was sauntering along taking in the sights.

"While thus engaged some one ran out of a doorway and called to him. Bob stopped.

"'A dying man is inside, and wishes to see you.'"

“ ‘Wishes to see me? Surely you must be mistaken.’

“ ‘No, I am not. Any one will do, but I want you to come.’

“Bob took a sudden resolution.

“ ‘Very well; I’ll go with you.’

“Bob followed the stranger into the abode of the supposed dying man, and found it a most miserable place.

“On a bed of straw lay an old man evidently in the last stages of disease. He looked up eagerly as the two entered.

“ ‘I am glad you got him,’ he murmured. ‘I can’t keep up much longer.’

“ ‘What does he want with me?’ asked Bob, looking somewhat perplexed.

“ ‘I’ll tell you,’ said the old man. ‘I am a miser, and have been one all my life, starving myself to lay up a fortune. I am now dying, but the fortune I’ve saved, though it will go to a stranger at last. In a strong box I have placed more than a hundred thousand dollars, and I desire it to be given to the only relative I have, if he is living. I don’t want the case to get into the courts, or the lawyers will divide the money among themselves. I would like to have two men, honest ones at that, to hunt up this relative, and deliver the fortune to him without any one else knowing anything about it. Dr. Hinds is a man I can trust, and I want you to help him. I’ll allow you a thousand dollars apiece if you give the rest to my nephew.’

“ ‘But where is he?’ asked Younger.

“ ‘Ah, I have no idea. I only know that his father, who was my only brother, died many years ago, and that we had no connections far or near outside of our two families. My brother’s wife was not long following her husband; and their boy, my nephew, was thus left without a friend in the world, for even I, his own flesh and blood, would then in my greed have refused him a home. I have not heard of him since that time, thirteen years ago. I want you to find him, and make reparation by giv-

ing him the wealth which should have been his years ago.'

" 'His name?'

" 'Theodore Howard. Now, draw up a paper, Dr. Hinds, stating that I bequeath all of my money to my nephew, Theodore Howard, except two thousand dollars, which is to pay you two gentlemen for all expenses incurred in hunting him up; and you will be witnesses one for the other.'

"Younger studied the face of Mr. Hinds as the latter drew up the document.

"He saw that he had an honest man to deal with, but a bold scheme had suddenly entered his head, a scheme which contemplated the appropriation to himself, not of a thousand dollars, but the whole fortune.

"He knew it could not be done by means of collusion with his colleague, so he determined to employ the only remaining weapon in his possession, fraud.

"The paper drawn up and read, Samuel Howard signed it with trembling hands.

" 'Now sign as witnesses,' he said, breathlessly, 'and I can die comparatively easy in mind.'

"Both men attached their signatures, and with his last breath the dying man located the position of the box.

"He had desired that Dr. Hinds should retain possession of it until the young man were found, and then Younger should see that it reached the proper owner.

"This was immediately done; the old man buried, and the two administrators met for a final conference.

"Younger conducted himself in such a gentlemanly and honorable manner that Dr. Hinds was quite charmed with him.

" 'Now, doctor,' said Bob, in parting, 'I shall institute due inquiries, and in case I make any discoveries, I shall let you know at once.'

" 'I feel sure you will,' answered the other, warmly, 'and will be very glad to hear from you on that or any other subject frequently.'

"Younger, who knew perfectly well where Theo

Howard was located, returned to Minneapolis, and struck up an acquaintance with Stark. It is scarcely necessary to say that Younger is a member of a gang which makes robbery its principal business. Two of the men, as you are aware, met the man Scott by accident, and after they had succeeded in getting him under the influence of liquor, they wormed from him a part of the arrangements he had made with you and Stark. The rest of the story you are familiar with: how you three started on your journey, and were waylaid by a band of masked men, and how this same band under the leadership of the master hand is moving heaven and earth to accomplish its purpose. The capture of the money from you and Stark was but a small part of the programme, and came in only incidentally."

"And you are willing to allow us to go after you have obtained the money?"

"Certainly. Why not? After this haul is made, and the money divided, the gang will separate, and leave this part of the country. It will require a sharp detective to capture any of them. Haven't they been trying for years, but with what success? Oh, yes; they are perfectly safe."

"How long will it take to obtain this money?"

"Only a few days; just long enough to go to Chicago and back."

"Do you think Dr. Hinds will be satisfied with any such flimsy scheme as you have gotten up?"

"It is not at all flimsy, you will find. In the first place, you are supposed by the world to be dead."

"What!"

"Nothing more or less than dead. Two days after you disappeared, a man was found answering your description, and he was buried under your name. Two days before the robbery Younger wrote a letter to the doctor stating that he had found the nephew, and inclosed newspaper slips containing references to your name and position. To this was added the advice that he expected to start for Chicago in a day or two at the outside. Immediately after the bank robbery papers containing accounts of the incident, together with your disappearance,

were sent him, and still later the description of the recovery of your body, with all the sad attendant circumstances. Now, behold the subtlety of our plot. You owe Stark thirty dollars; by the simple change of a word or two it becomes a hundred thousand dollars. Stark is well known in this city; he has had business dealings with you, and Dr. Hinds will not question the amount of indebtedness. Stark will go with Younger to Dr. Hinds, but not your friend Stark; he will keep you company until Younger's return. Fortunately one of the gang bears a curious resemblance to the real Stark, and with some little touches here and there would deceive a casual acquaintance. This is the man, then, who will accompany Younger. He will present this note of Howard's, who has been proved dead and buried; what can the gentleman do except hand over the money?"

"What if Dr. Hinds should refuse?"

"We have sworn to have the money peaceably first, but it must inevitably fall into our hands."

"What is the date of the note?"

"Ten days before your supposed death."

It is necessary for us to state that Irene's story was in the main correct, with the exceptions, of course, that Stark and Younger were identical; that the overhearing of Scott's plan for selling the mine was a picture drawn by her imagination, and that Scott, whose name was assumed, was a member of the band.

"Now, Mr. Howard, you have the facts in the case before you. Is it life or death for your friend? Is it life or death for yourself?"

"The money would do much for me," said Theo, thoughtfully.

"Not without life to enjoy it. Remember, it will never under any circumstances belong to you."

Theo realized the hopelessness of his position here; once free he might recover this money, or at least bring some of the robbers to justice; so with a long-drawn sigh he said at last:

"I will sign the paper."

CHAPTER XX.

SIGNING THE PAPER.

A double quartet of robbers. One of the most notable as well as the most bloodthirsty set of men that ever plotted against the life and property of their fellow men.

And what names shall we write over against this notorious aggregation, except the names history has given them?

Read the list: Frank and Jesse James, Bob, Jim, and Coleman Younger, Charlie Pitts, Clell Miller, and Bill Chadwell.

Where can the records of the past locate in one combination eight men more reckless, more murderous, more regardless of the rights of others, more daring in their determination to do evil?

They need no introduction from us; their deeds of darkness have spoken for them; but here they are, and it is our duty to chronicle a few of the final acts in their career of crime, acts that led to the breaking up of the band and the fitting termination of the lives of some of them.

"I wish this infernal Chicago business was over," said Jesse, impatiently. "Here we've been lying cooped up for days, and the end as far off as ever."

"Three days, perhaps two, will let us out," said Bob. "You might go on with your cracking party at Northfield while we are at Chicago; but I don't believe in running too many things at one time. Let us finish this business, and have all our plans ready to strike Northfield instantly afterward. Should the former movement be successful, and the latter a failure, how would you ever get your share of the money? No, let us do one thing, and do it well before attempting another."

Bob's opinion prevailed, and it was agreed that the remaining time they had at their disposal should be put in studying the topography of the surronud-

ing country under the tutelage of Bill Chadwell, who was perfectly acquainted both with the lay of the land and with those people who could be relied upon for aid should they be pursued after their attempt at robbery.

While they were discussing irrelevant matters, the door was opened, and Irene appeared.

"Most noble seigniors," she said, with mock courtesy, "your prisoner has been overcome with compassion for his starving friend. He has consented to attach his name to the document which will make his starving friend, as well as the rest of us, independent for the remainder of our lives. Will you come now and witness the signing?"

"Perhaps I had better remain behind," said Younger, with a significant smile.

"And I," remarked Chadwell, who had been sailing under the cognomen of Scott.

"Six will be enough," was Irene's reply, "but should they need a seventh, the Queen is willing to sacrifice herself."

When the party entered Howard's room all doubts as to the genuineness of Irene's story vanished.

Clell approached and unlocked his handcuffs, while each of the other five impressively cocked their revolvers as a silent warning against any attempt to escape.

Theo smiled scornfully.

"Brave men, to be afraid that one unarmed, half starved fellow might prevail against you!"

No answer, but the weapons remained fixed in deadly aim upon his heart.

Irene brought forward a rude stand, upon which were placed pens, ink, and the document requiring his signature.

"Sign," she said, and withdrew to one side.

Theo picked up the paper, and read it through mechanically. It was the same as he had read before, and seizing the pen hurriedly, as if to finish an unpleasant task as soon as possible, he wrote his name in bold characters at the bottom.

Irene approached, picked up the desk, and retired from the room.

Clell brought the handcuffs and again placed them about the prisoner's wrists; slowly the revolvers were lowered from their target, and one by one the robbers withdrew.

Theo was again left with his own thoughts.

"What have I done?" he mused. "I am so much in the dark that it is useless speculating on the matter. I must wait with what patience I can summon until the explanation comes. It may never come, but I shall be satisfied with the consolation that my last deed was one of mercy. And Myra! I am afraid I shall never look upon her beautiful face again, but there's a hereafter, an eternity of happy meetings that I hope are in store for us."

Casting himself upon his rude couch, he fell into a deep slumber that lasted until the break of day.

In the meantime Bob Younger and his brother Jim were making active preparations for immediate departure to Chicago on their nefarious errand. They were to leave the depot at Minneapolis on the early morning train so as to arrive as soon as possible at their destination on the morrow.

It was their purpose to get back on the following day, finishing up their reckoning at the stone house, and depart that night for Northfield, thirty-three miles away.

"Am I to go with you?" cried Irene, as nothing was mentioned concerning her in their preparations.

"I think you were told once before that you could not."

"But I shall. Have I gone to all this trouble in assisting you, simply to be told like a child that I cannot do a thing which will in no way interfere with your plans, except those that may be intended to defraud any of the band of their just portion?"

"You know it will be well nigh impossible for three of us to get out of the city without detection."

"I can disguise myself perfectly, and need not be seen with you."

"But we have other work for you."

"What is that?"

"The abduction of Myra Ferry."

"Why, that is a new move."

"And a very necessary one. We have discovered that the lady has been seen in consultation with Belton, and it is likely that she is possessed of much that he knows about us and our plans. Now that Belton is out of the way, she is the only one we have to fear; and we must take especial pains to prevent her from imparting any information to those who might be in a position to molest our plans before they are consummated. We have, therefore, decided to abduct her until such time as all danger shall be over, after which she may be released, unless something unforeseen turns up in the meantime. The manner of abduction we will leave to the fertile brains of yourself and Jesse, assisted by the others who remain. What say you?"

"I suppose I might as well give in," said Irene, resignedly.

It threw her into a situation that promised some excitement and possibly danger, and excitement was her chief object in life.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PRETTY WAITING-MAID.

A plainly dressed, but very pretty young woman ran up the steps of the Ferry residence, and rang the door-bell.

"May I see Miss Ferry?" she asked the servant, who appeared in answer to the summons.

"What name shall I give?"

"Miss Todd."

The servant seemed to hesitate.

"Your business with her?"

"That I can best explain to the young lady myself."

"Step into this room, then," and the girl went off in search of her mistress.

Five minutes later Miss Ferry stood in the presence of her visitor.

"I believe you have something to say to me," she

said, inquiringly, admiration for the lovely girl before her shining out of her own beautiful features.

A delicate flush came upon Miss Todd's countenance as she arose with a low bow.

"I am in search of a situation, Miss Ferry, and understanding that you are just now in need of a maid, I am here to make application for the place."

"You have had experience, I presume?"

"Oh, yes; here is a recommendation from Mrs. Haney, and here is another from Miss Poole. You are acquainted with the ladies, are you not?"

"Slightly; but I see they speak very highly of your services. Our girl left us yesterday, and we had not made up our minds to engage another one just at present, but if you are really capable, and mother is pleased with you, as indeed I cannot see how she can help being, I know of no reason why we should not employ you."

The tears sprang into the lovely eyes.

"Oh, if you only knew how thankful I would be! We are very poor people, and depend mainly on my wages for our support. My sister is very ill, and needs medicine, which cannot be obtained without money."

Myra pitied the girl exceedingly when she manifested such evident emotion, and was tempted to take her in her arms then and there; her mother, who entered the room at the moment, seemed more than pleased with the applicant; so the bargain was closed at once—Miss Todd was engaged as maid.

"Now, what shall we call you?" asked Myra.

"Mary is my name," she said, simply.

"A very pretty and modest name!" said Mrs. Ferry, quite enthusiastically. "It seems to suit the owner to a nicety."

The owner blushed becomingly, and said she was afraid she did not merit such high praise, but hoped that she would at least give them satisfaction.

She then set about her work in such a deft and thorough manner as to strengthen their already flattering opinion of her.

She seemed so happy at having obtained the situation that she, to use her own words, "surprised her-

self by bursting into some merry song, forgetful for the time that her sister was so ill; but she was so glad that she would now be able to buy her what medicine would be needed, that it didn't seem very wrong to sing a little, did it?"



BOB YOUNGER.

"Oh, no," good Mrs. Ferry hastened to say; "sing all you want to, child. Your sister does not know it, while it will do you and us a world of good."

And the pretty maid was so overcome with joy at this statement that she actually embraced the sympathetic woman, and declared with tears in her eyes that she would never forget her kindness.

Myra came into the room in the course of time, and surprised the new maid, who was gazing intently at a portrait of Theo Howard, which hung upon the wall.

"What a handsome picture!" she exclaimed in extenuation of her culpable curiosity.

"Some people think it very handsome," said Myra, coldly, but very quietly, unaware that a pair of eyes bright as those of a hawk were watching her every expression of countenance.

It was wonderful what a transient change had come over the features of this seemingly modest and retiring girl.

"You will pardon my inquisitiveness," Mary hastened to plead, "but in passing through this room I happened to see the portrait, and as it seemed to bear such a striking resemblance to a young man I had seen at Miss Poole's, I stopped to study it. I think his name was Howard."

"You are probably correct," said Myra. "The name of this gentleman is, or rather was, Howard."

Again the hawk-like eyes searched every lineament of the calm, pale face.

"Dead?" she said, softly. "And he seemed so full of health and life then."

"He would have been full of health and life yet had he not met with a violent death."

The pale face may have become paler yet, but it was hardly perceptible.

"Not murdered!" cried Mary, with horror-stricken gaze. "You don't mean to say he was murdered?"

"Unfortunately, your surmise is only too true," was the reply, as Myra turned away to attend to some duty. "He was foully murdered while engaged at his legitimate business, perhaps while defending the property of others."

"What an awful fate! That can't surely be the Mr. Howard who lost his life in the robbery of the Fidelity Bank?"

"The same."

"Has no clew been found to the robbers—murderers, I should say?"

Ah! could Myra have seen the expression of those eyes now.

"It seems not."

"How stupid those detectives must be!" cried Mary, with flashing orbs. "I believe I could do better myself."

Myra smiled at her vehemence.

"I am afraid you would be a lamb among wolves if you were to turn detective."

"I'd do it willingly anyhow for a man like Mr. Howard, if I thought it would do any good."

No change in Myra's countenance; one would never have suspected from her looks that Theo Howard had been other than the merest acquaintance to her.

"Oh, well it is hardly necessary to discuss the matter further. Mr. Howard is buried, his crime goes unpunished, but in the great hereafter all, doubtless, will be made plain."

Mary, feeling herself dismissed, went about her work, but there was an unsatisfied look on her face that gave a pretty good indication of the trend of her thoughts.

"She is hard to read; not one single idea have I gained from all those questions I put to her. She seems almost to have forgotten that such a person as Theo Howard ever existed, yet with such a girl as she seems to be, feelings of that kind are most unnatural, provided she ever did care for him. I have understood that she was very much in love with him, and if that was the case, then she must now be playing a part, unless she is of a very fickle nature, which I certainly don't believe.

"But what can she have discovered, if she is wearing a mask? She was at the grave on that night; did she discover that the man who was buried there was not Theo Howard? Julian Stark afterward called on her; she was grief-stricken. What did that show? Only that she had made no discov-

ery, or else that she was playing the actress to perfection.

"I come to her as a maid, and bring up the subject so that she cannot help showing her grief, if she is actuated by any such emotion; I find her perfectly calm, a decided contrast to Julian's experience with her.

"Has she made any discovery since? Surely not. Is she playing a part? She surely must be. Anyhow, in order to be on the safe side, Myra Ferry must be abducted, and that this very night.

"But her mother is such a dear old lady, so trustful, so sympathetic toward the poor waiting-maid, that if she knows anything concerning Miss Myra's late doings, I feel sure that the said poor waiting-maid will in a very short time become possessed of the same information."

An hour later, as Mrs. Ferry was seated all alone in her room, Myra having gone out to make a call on a sick friend, Mary approached the door, and knocked softly.

Obedying the occupant's command, she entered, with a timid smile.

"I was afraid you might be lonesome, dear Mrs. Ferry, and thought I had best come and sit with you a while if you should like me to do so."

"Certainly, child; I shall be glad of your company. I often am left alone, as Myra has frequent calls upon her attention from her society friends; but for my part I generally prefer home, although I like plenty of company in the house."

"I am afraid I shall not prove very entertaining, but I'll do the best I can. You'll know there's somebody in the room, anyhow."

"And a very pretty somebody, too," patting the cheeks that had suddenly become very rosy.

"Oh, I'm afraid you'll spoil me before I leave," cried Mary, in very shamefacedness.

"And I hope the parting will be long delayed, if you keep on charming us in the way you have begun. But we must hide that face indoors, or some one will be stealing it ere we are aware of it."

"There it is again! Really, Mrs. Ferry, I am beginning to think you are a great flatterer."

"Not at all, child; I have simply fallen in love with you, and I know my daughter is also very much pleased with you, although she is somewhat more reserved in her statements than I; and I think that when she praises a servant that servant must be a good one."

"I am so glad to have won your approbation; I was really afraid I had offended Miss Myra a few minutes ago."

"Why?"

"She caught me staring at a portrait in her room, and she seemed so cold in her manner when I spoke of it that I was fearful she had taken offense at my curiosity."

Mrs. Ferry sighed.

"It was a sad, very sad, affair, and one that Myra dislikes to discuss with any one; but I do not think you offended her. You mistook silent grief for haughtiness."

"Oh, he was her lover, then?"

"Yes, they would have been married in a short time had it not been for his untimely death. To make the affair more sad, it occurred while we were absent on a trip to Europe, or rather while we were on our way home."

"How mournful!" as the ready tear came into her eye. "But one good thing seems to be that she bears up under it wonderfully well."

"Myra is a woman who does not wear her griefs or her joys upon her sleeve; but I must say I was surprised myself, for I thought the shock would have thrown her into a fever."

"Was she satisfied that her lover was dead?"

"Mercy, child! what do you mean?"

Mary confusedly hastened to explain.

"I suppose you knew that the corpse had been mutilated when found?"

"Oh, yes, we knew that; but to my knowledge Myra never questioned his death, nor did any of us."

"It seems peculiar that it was never mentioned."

"Nevertheless it was not spoken of among us. I

presume we had so much regard for our daughter's feelings that we considered it best to let every thing, even discussion and surmise, alone."

"Has your daughter been out at night since her return?"

Seeing Mrs. Ferry's look of gentle surprise at such apparent inquisitiveness, the girl immediately added:

"I am afraid you consider me very curious, but I assure you it is anything else than curiosity. I was about to presume on your generosity so far as to ask if it would be possible for Miss Myra to visit my sister this evening in company with me, but I am fearful I have gone too far, and asked too much. Yet the poor thing is so miserable while alone that a call from a beautiful and bright young woman like your daughter would be better even than medicine," and the penitent yet sorrowful maid hid her face in her handkerchief, and wept softly.

"Never mind, Mary. You made no mistake. Myra would doubtless be very willing to go with you in order to relieve her mind of the harrowing feelings that have lately overwhelmed her."

"But if she has been accustomed to retire early she may like to do so to-night."

"Only the greater reason why she should make a change. Not a night has passed since our return that has not found her in bed at nine o'clock. Oh, yes; I'm sure she will go with you."

CHAPTER XXII.

CAPTURED BY THE ENEMY.

Mary could have danced with joy at the information she had just obtained.

Myra had evidently kept secret her visit to the grave, and as Belton was disposed of for all time, surely no one else except Bill Jones would be able to tell anything about their discovery, if discovery they had made; and after Younger's return and division of the spoils, it mattered but little who told

the secret, as the conspirators would then be far enough away.

Myra's tongue must be therefore silenced for the present, while Jones would be merely watched, for it was hardly likely that he would take any action unless by order from his superior.

In the meantime Myra had returned from her call, looking tired and worn. Mary thought it best, under the circumstances, to delay her invitation until evening; and then she went to her mistress with the most timid air.

"If you will allow me, Miss Ferry, I should be glad to visit my sister to-night, and take a little medicine with me."

"By all means go. I'm sorry I didn't think of it, or you might have gone sooner."

"Thank you."

Seeing that the girl hesitated, Myra said, kindly:

"Is there anything else that you want? Oh, money, of course. I had forgotten that," and she tendered the maid a bill.

Mary still hesitated.

"Well, what else is there you wish to say?" she smiled.

"I am afraid to ask you."

"There is no need to be afraid, for if I can grant your wish I will readily consent; and if I cannot, of course I shall tell you so."

"Yes, I will state my request. I would esteem it a great privilege and honor to have you go with me to-night."

"Impossible, I am afraid, Mary."

The tears came into the latter's eyes as she said:

"My sister would be so glad to see you. I have looked upon your possible visit all day with the hope that it would make a break in poor Lizzie's weary hours of misery."

Myra seemed uncertain what to do. The appeal of the helpless was to her the call of duty always, and she felt like obeying it now.

"I am tired this evening, Mary; besides I have an appointment with the chief of police in a little while."

The maid clapped her hands in apparent joy, though her heart gave an awful thump of fear; she must act quickly if she wished to prevent the downfall of their plans.

"That will suit exactly. When you reach our house it will be a part of your journey to the police headquarters, and if you like I can go on with you from that point."

"It is wholly unnecessary, as I would prefer that you remain with your sister over night, and come to me in the morning. I can easily take the cars after leaving your dwelling, and accomplish my errand without any attendant."

"Then you will go?" joyfully.

"Yes; I shall be pleased to spend a few minutes with your sister if it will be the means of affording her a little solace."

"Let me thank you for the kindness. The future will alone show how deeply it is appreciated."

"That will do," said Myra, with a smile at the lightning change from sorrow to joy. "Now get your hat, and we will start at once."

Darkness had fallen over the city.

Pedestrians were hurrying on their way as if in expectation of a breaking out of the storm that was evidently in the air.

The two women walked hastily on their way, like their fellow men, neither saying much, for both seemed busy with their thoughts.

The maid cast her bright eyes about her from time to time as if in search of possible danger or surveillance, but Myra gazed only straight ahead.

She was thinking of Belton and his promise to meet her this night; of Theo and his possible whereabouts.

The last thought brought a sob to her bosom.

She was not even yet certain that her lover was alive.

He might at this moment be lying somewhere with his dead face turned upward toward the stars, his body the prey of the corroding elements. She could have cried outright at the idea, but bravely keeping down her emotion she hastened onward.

"Here is the place," said Mary at last, pausing before the door of a miserable looking abode.

She knocked, but there was silence inside.

She knocked again, and yet met with no response.

"They must be in the back part of the house," she explained.

Again she tried, and as Myra realized afterward, each knock was different from the preceding one.

Shuffling footsteps were now heard, a rattling noise, caused by the withdrawal of bolts, and then the door was opened a little space.

"Who is there?" asked a hoarse voice.

"It is I, father," said Mary, hurriedly. "Don't keep us waiting, please."

The door was then opened, and Mary went in first.

The room was in perfect darkness, the crazy old shutters being closed so that not a ray of light came from the outside world; and there was certainly none within.

Mary took her companion by the hand.

"Let me lead you," she said, persuasively.

"Lizzie is in the next room."

But Myra drew back in undefinable alarm.

"I am sorry we have no better accommodations," remarked the hoarse voice in what was intended to be a jovial tone, "but, Mary, you should let me know when you expect to bring visitors hereafter."

"I shall, dear father."

There was a sudden movement, and Myra felt her arms pinioned to her side by a pair of strong hands.

Quick of judgment, the girl at once knew she had permitted herself to be led into a position of the utmost danger; and just as quick to act, she gave vent to a scream intended as a call for help. But her foes, anticipating such a movement, cut off the scream almost in its incipency by clapping a handkerchief saturated with chloroform over her mouth and nostrils.

A convulsive effort to get her breath, a motion to break away, and Myra sank into the arms of the man who had opened the door for her.

"Quick, Cole!" said a voice; "let us get her into the next room."

At that moment a thundering knock burst upon the startled hearing of the conspirators.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN MANY DISGUISES.

Passengers were waiting to take the midnight train for Chicago.

Not many persons usually care about losing half the night's sleep to catch such a train, even when about to take a long journey, yet on this particular occasion quite a large number of people were standing about in the Minneapolis depot, either waiting for the train or for expected visitors.

Down the platform sat an old man bundled up to the neck in spite of the comparatively warm weather, and crouching over a wheezy old hand organ, out of which he from time to time ground such melodies as made the blood run cold. One gentleman who had deep-seated prejudices against hand organs in general and this rheumatic one in particular, approached, and said he would willingly give fifty cents if the operator would cease turning the crank for fifteen minutes.

"And, begorra," said the grinder, pocketing the money without a word of thanks, "who'll tell me whin me time is up?"

"I'll come back in a quarter of an hour," said the other, with a sly look at the few who stood around.

"Faith, I'll look for ye whin I see you, me frind."

"And you will not play again until you see me?"

"Troth, I'll not trust ye, sor; it's a long second that lays betwane your fourteen minutes, nointy-noin seconds, and your fifteen minutes. Now what are ye laughin' at, ye spalpeens?" glaring at the crowd which had suddenly increased and were snickering at his wonderful arithmetical knowledge.

"How many seconds in a minute anyhow, Pat?" asked a voice.

"A hoonderd, av coorse, bad louck to yez. How

many would ye want, ye greedy thafe of the worruld?"

"There's only sixty, Pat?"

"Oh, yer drunk!" cried the Irishman, wildly. "Say, mister," to a man who was walking by, not especially interested in the scene, but inclined rather to keep aloof, "have ye a watch, may I have the bad manners to ax ye?"

The man addressed passed on, pretending not to hear the request, while the so-called Pat, amidst the laughter of his audience, stood in his half-bent manner gazing curiously after the retreating form of the stranger.

"Now there's a man as is a gentleman," he muttered; "he don't have no time to stop and say there's sixty seconds in a minute when he knows there's a hoonderd. Och, the ignorance of some people!" and crouching down over his organ again, he became oblivious to his surroundings.

Even the request to grind his melodious instrument was unheeded.

But at last his withered old face brightened.

"There she is now; may I rid meself foriver of this place!" and he hobbled along toward the train with the organ on his back.

The brakeman, after inquiring his destination, assisted him to mount the steps, and soon he was ensconced in the back seat, his beloved instrument at his side.

Using it as a pillow, he settled himself in a reclining position, and was soon apparently fast asleep; but just as the train started with a slight jerk he half opened his eyes, and caught a glimpse of an every day laborer entering the car with a dinner bucket in one hand and a shovel on his shoulder.

The man referred to walked the length of the car, as if hesitating what seat to take.

As he passed the organ-grinder, a small slip of brown paper fell from his hand to the feet of the reclining man.

A brakeman at the door barred his further progress, stating that he was not permitted to go into the next car; so with a muttered word of anger he

walked back and sat down in a central seat where he deposited his utensils, and, like many others, prepared for a nap.

In the meantime the Irishman, evidently not resting easy, fidgetted about a while, and then sat upright.

Stooping ostensibly to fasten his shoe, his fingers closed over the piece of brown paper.

Placing it on his knee, and smoothing it out with his dirty hand, as if he were examining with some anxiety the state of his pantaloons in that locality, he read the words hastily written:

"Spotted one of them—drummer—plug hat—brown valise—mustache ditto."

Pat's bleared eyes traversed the car in a half sleepy, wholly idiotic, stare.

Seated across from him, and at a little distance ahead, was a man answering this description.

His eyes were fixed on the organ-grinder in a way which indicated that he was studying that individual's physiognomy with what success however his own countenance gave no indication.

"Same fellow as hadn't time to tell me he had or hadn't a watch. Wonder where the other one is?"

The "other one," if, indeed, there was another one, did not seem to have any existence just then.

The drummer seemed wholly alone, and after the analysis to which he subjected the organ-grinder, he returned to his cigar, and puffed away to his heart's content. Not a single look or sign showed that he knew any one in the car.

"A part of their game," soliloquized the man of music, "but it doesn't throw me off the track; guess I'll go to sleep now," and he once more leaned on the organ, which gave forth a dismal groan at this double imposition.

Scarcely had he assumed his reclining position when the back door opened, and a gentleman entered, evidently for the purpose of having a smoke.

"Hello, Pat," he cried, as the train rattled away in the darkness, "why isn't your music going?"

Pat opened his eyes, and looked at his interlocutor sleepily.

"Oh, it's yersilf, is it? Faith, I didn't know my fifteen minutes was up."

"Pat, Pat! I'm afraid you're a hard case. A man as old as you, with one foot in the grave, ought to be more careful of his language; truth is as becoming to old age as respect is to youth."

"Then answer me wan question, me youthful, respectful friend."

"Certainly."

"I would loike to know which fut ye mane."

The stranger laughed, and passed on.

A moment later he had sat down with the drummer, as the other seats were full. Pat shook his head.

"He's not the other one, anyhow. Younger is not in this car, that I am sure of. Now, where is he?"

In the course of time the stranger finished his cigar and went back into the car from which he had come, but as Pat was fast asleep he thought it best not to disturb his slumbers.

The train finally stopped at a station, and the laborer, picking up his bucket and shovel, left the car.

The drummer, who was still smoking, gave no indication of having noticed his departure.

Several other passengers alighted from the train at this point, and a few came aboard, among them a man who seemed very much like a farmer.

He hesitated for a time which car to take, but at last concluded to go into the second apartment.

Once there he, in his halting, verdant way, slipped into a seat beside a ministerial looking personage with side whiskers, a broadcloth suit, and a habit of folding and rubbing his hands with such a sanctimonious air as to betray his profession outside of any ocular evidence to the same purpose.

"Any objection to me takin' part of this here seat?" asked the verdant gentleman, with a sheepish, timid look.

"None in the least," and the minister, with the blandest of smiles, immediately made room for him.

"Are you going far?" he inquired a moment later, thinking to make himself companionable.

"I don't mind tellin' you. I'm agoin' to Chicago."

"Indeed! Quite a distance to travel."

"Yes, but that's what I want. You see I've lived on a farm allus; I 'spect you know that from my 'pearance; and dad says t'other day, says dad, 'Simeon, you've stayed to home and worked purty hard this year; how would you like to take a trip? How would you like to go to Chicago?' Gosh! who wouldn't like to go to Chicago? So I packed up a lunch in this here basket, put on my best clothes," looking with no little pride at the faded and ill-fitting suit he wore, "and here I am. What's more, I'm goin' to stay two hull days in the city, and see the intire business. I've got ten dollars besides my ticket," and he slapped his pocket with great gusto.

The clergyman looked with much interest at this pardonable display of enthusiasm.

"So this is your first visit to the Windy City?"

"The what city, did you say?" inquired the countryman, in some alarm. "Not the Windy City?"

"To be sure. That is what they call it."

"Ef that's the case," said the other, looking around for his basket in manifest fear, "ef that's the case, why, I don't go there. No cyclones or hurricanes for me, if you please!"

"Oh, you misunderstand me altogether," the minister remarked, smiling in spite of himself. "Chicago is no more subject to storms than your own country home, doubtless; although, of course, the lake breeze is sometimes rather lively. That is why people give it that name."

"Sho! is that all. I was raally beginnin' to be skeered from the way you was talkin'. Air you goin' there?"

"Possibly. If some friends I expect to meet me at S—— are not there, I shall be obliged to go on to Chicago."

"You've traveled a heap, I reckon?"

"Yes, considerably," with a complacent look in his reverend countenance. "My business has compelled me to go many a mile."

"Preacher, I reckon?"

"A good guess. How did you know?"

"Oh, I ain't so green as I look. I've saw preachers afore; yes, lots of 'em, some purty slick ones like yourself, and some not so slick, ruther seedy-lookin' and half starved like, and all of 'em with big families. How many childer mought you hev, mister?"

"Only three."

"Is that all? Oh, well, you're young yet."

A half hour had passed thus in aimless conversation, when suddenly there came a crash, and a shiver as of dread passed over the car which the next instant rolled over on its side, amid the cries of deadly alarm that issued from the throats of the passengers.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BANDIT, THE TRAMP, AND A LUMP OF COAL.

The organ-grinder suddenly awoke and looked around in a vacant way.

As the conductor was passing the old fellow caught him by the elbow, and said, somewhat excitedly:

"Say, conductor, ye haven't gone and passed me station, have ye?"

"No; yours is the next stop. Better not go to sleep again."

"All right, sor; faith an' I'll not trust meself in the arms of Morbos agin."

By the time the train stoppèd at the desired station the organ-grinder had gathered all his possessions, and was ready to alight.

He hobbled away, feeling that the drummer's eyes were following his every movement.

He had not disappeared around the station more than a minute when from that direction came a man ragged and dirty, a veritable tramp, and a most ill-looking customer at that.

The train had begun to move, but with an agile run he reached the steps, and entered the forward car.

The drummer had changed his position, and was

now on the side opposite the station. He had been watching the passengers who were getting off or on, and had most likely seen the organ-grinder take his departure, but so far he had not noticed the entrance of the tramp.

The conductor had his eye on the fellow, however, probably thinking that he might have trouble in collecting his fare; and when he got a close glimpse of that evil countenance, he made up his mind that he had not seen so tough a man, as far as appearances went, for many a day.

"Ticket, sir," he said a moment later.

The tramp turned the axis of his vision upon the official in an impudent stare.

"Haven't none."

"Your money, then."

"How much to Chicago?" with an attempt to speak as low as possible.

The amount was named, and the fellow dived down into his rags, fishing therefrom a collection of bills of various denominations.

He slowly counted out the money, and handed it over to the conductor.

"There you are, neighbor. Suppose you didn't think I hadn't nothing," finishing up this decidedly negative sentence with an evil chuckle.

The railroad man passed on without reply, glad that he had experienced so little trouble in collecting his fare, while the tramp, after settling himself comfortably, stared into vacancy, probably ruminating where and under what circumstances he would pass the next night.

In the midst of his musings came an awful crash, and he at once realized that there had been a collision or wreck.

He was somewhat shaken up himself, but he did not fail to notice that the drummer was on his feet in a moment, fighting his way out of the car in the greatest hurry and trepidation.

"I'll follow the gentleman," muttered the man of rags; "he evidently means business of some kind, and I must find out what it is."

So without particular exertion he worked his way forward until he found himself in the open air.

He now saw that a broken rail had been the cause of the disaster.

The engine was still in an upright position, though off the track, and all the cars were more or less damaged.

Several passengers had been injured, though fortunately no one was killed, but it would take hours to clear the track.

The drummer had in the meantime approached the engineer, and was talking earnestly to him. The latter shook his head occasionally in such a manner as to lead one to believe that he was being asked a favor, and was obliged to refuse it.

"Ah, the gentleman does mean business; now we'll see how he's going to accomplish it."

Suddenly bethinking himself, the tramp went back to the second car, which he found to have been overturned.

He entered, and passed on until he came to a man who had evidently been injured, as he at times gave utterance to a moan, and was clearly unable to walk.

"Stranger, you seem to be hurt, from the fuss you are makin'."

"I am, dod rot it! I'm in a purty bad fix, I guess."

"I guess you are, myself. You're most gone, I allow. Where do you want your body sent?"

The injured man looked a little alarmed at this cool question, but he at once gave vent to a laugh.

"Oh, I'm not so bad hurt as all that. I've had my leg wrenched a little, but I'll soon be able to walk."

"Was you ridin' with anybody?"

A significant look passed between the couple.

"Yes, a preacher set with me, a mighty slick one, too, and he was goin' to Chicago same as me. When the crash come he up and out like a flash o' lightnin', guess he wasn't any more anxious than the rest of us to pass in his checks."

The tramp leaned down as if to examine the other's wound.

"I guess I'll have to leave you, Bill. I see they're up to some dodge. One of them was talking to the engineer a moment ago, and I wouldn't be surprised if they were to make an effort to push on in some way. Get along the best way you can, and follow on the next train if you are able. Maybe when you arrive in Chicago I'll have some news for you."

The tramp, as if satisfied with the examination, made the stranger as comfortable as he could, considering the position of the car, and then passed out.

The drummer was still talking to the engineer, but he had now been joined by the minister, who was half listening, while apparently inspecting the damage done the engine.

At that moment a cloud of smoke arose ahead of them, and an engine, unaccompanied with cars, was seen approaching.

It stopped a short distance away when the men on board saw what had happened.

Scarcely had the wheels ceased to revolve when the drummer and clergyman were at the side of the locomotive.

"Engineer, how far is it to B——?"

"Seven miles."

"How long is it until the next train starts westward from that point?"

"In ten minutes precisely," looking at his watch.

The two men clambered into the engine.

"Engineer, a great many people are injured among the cars back there, who will need medical attendance at the earliest practicable moment. We wish to get away on the train you spoke of, and will give you fifty dollars if you can get us to B—— in sufficient time to catch it. Quick! what do you say?"

The engineer hesitated.

"Remember it is to bring back physicians and aid generally, as well as to carry us forward."

The engineer placed his hand on the lever; there was a succession of puffs, a grinding of wheels, a streak of smoke, and to the wonder of the passengers who had witnessed a small part of the scene,

the locomotive, with its occupants, was out of sight in a flash.

The tramp had seen all this, and in a moment divined the object of the two gentlemen.

As soon as he saw them enter the cab he ran along the track unperceived, yet only by the greatest exertion did he succeed in reaching the tender in time to become a passenger.

He clambered up, and placed himself so as to remain concealed from those in front, but his position was one of great danger, inasmuch as he was momentarily in risk of being thrown from his perch by the rough motion of the engine.

The ground seemed to slip from under him with the rapidity of lightning, and every now and then the rays of the rising sun fell upon the glistening rails like the flashing of diamonds.

"This is glorious!" cried the tramp, his voice broken into a thousand fragments by the constant jolting. "I could ride forever in such a place as this if it would only take me as fast to fame and fortune."

The two gentlemen in the cab began to feel easy.

"We've outwitted them at last," said the clergyman, in tones that could be heard only by the drummer, seeing that the trainmen were too much engaged in their work to think of listening, even could they have heard.

"It's taken hard work, though," was the reply. "I was a long time getting on to the organ-grinder, but when he disappeared I was altogether lost. If he was on the train afterward it was in a disguise I didn't penetrate. That Belton's a deep man, I can tell you."

"I reckon you don't know whom I rode with part of the way?"

"Maybe another of them."

"Exactly; Bill Jones, in the shape of a green countryman, had the audacity to sit down alongside of me for about two hours."

"Rather risky business for him."

"It wouldn't have been, had an accident not occurred that overthrew his calculations and put me

on my feet. He leaned forward to place his basket on the floor of the car, when an envelope slipped part way out of his pocket. I saw the address, 'William Jones, Minneapolis,' and even then was unwilling to believe the evidence of my own eyes, so well had he carried out his role; but when I asked him his name and he told me it was Simeon Davis, I was convinced of his identity. As he was hurt, however, I don't suppose he can do us any harm."

"We'd best keep a sharp lookout for him anyhow."

The drummer, Jim Younger, in other words, was uneasy; he felt as if he were not safe, and that their plan were quite likely to miscarry. Obeying a curious impulse, he clambered over the heap of coal in the tender, and steadying himself on the top as well as he was able, he looked about him.

The engine was speeding along at a frightful rate, and swayed from side to side in its wild career.

What was that almost at his feet?

A head, a human head, bobbing up and down, now visible, now invisible, the hat torn and dilapidated, with a tangled lock escaping from a rent in texture.

A tramp, was Jim's first thought, availing himself of the exhilaration of a free ride; then came to mind the remembrance of the dirty looking individual who had gotten on the cars some distance back, but where?

Ah! the same place at which the organ-grinder had alighted.

Jim leaned farther forward, but while he gained a more complete view, still it was not convincing; the tramp was too well disguised, if disguise he wore at all, to betray his identity. Notwithstanding, in that moment of uncertainty, the bandit had decided that the tramp must die.

It would not do to take any chances in the matter; if the fellow should turn out to be Belton, well and good; if not, then the world would be rid of one more tramp.

He placed his hand on his revolver, but the noise

of a shot would doubtless be heard by the engine-men.

A much better and safer plan!

The engine at that moment was thundering over a bridge; seizing a lump of coal, he leaned over and dropped it on the head of the tramp, who instantly disappeared from view, only to reappear in the fraction of a second, whirling through the air at a sickening rate, until a sudden lurch cut off from his view the fate of the man he had hurled to sudden death.

CHAPTER XXV.

MYRA A PRISONER.

"Quick!" cried one of the conspirators. "Let us get out of this place."

Seizing the unconscious girl, the two women who were in the room carried her into the next apartment, and Mary, whom our readers doubtless know to be Irene, locked the door, as the front door was broken by a couple of men who in passing by had heard Myra's scream, and had stopped to investigate.

One of them struck a match, but of course found the room empty.

They then attempted to open the middle door, and found it locked on the other side. By the time they had succeeded in forcing it the birds had flown, leaving only a few unsatisfactory tracks behind.

The affair was reported to the police authorities, but was not unraveled by the guardians of the peace.

In the meantime the abductors passed through the tumble-down kitchen, down the ill-smelling back yard, and reached the alley gate.

Here a cab was in waiting, and in it was placed the still unconscious form of Myra.

Irene and one of the men seated themselves inside to prevent any outcry on the part of the helpless girl when she should return to consciousness, while the remaining man took his seat beside the driver.

"See here," said the latter, uneasily; "I don't like the looks of this. I'm afraid you're going to get me into trouble."

"Not a bit of it, my good fellow," was the persuasive reply of the other. "Whip up your nags, and I'll tell you why."

"But I don't see how you are goin' to explain away an abduction case."

"This way; at a convenient spot you get off, and I become driver. You don't know where I go, and I don't care about you knowing; but as you get paid well just the same, you needn't care. In time I return with your outfit none the worse for the wear, and jump off; you again become driver. Isn't it plain enough?"

"It is, if somethin' doesn't leak out."

"Don't let it leak out then; we won't. No harm is intended to the young lady, and I wouldn't be surprised to hear of this same cab taking her back."

"I would," was the terse reply of the driver as he applied the whip, mentally resolving that if he ever got safely out of this scrape he'd keep clear of any further entanglements of the same nature.

In half an hour they had reached the outskirts of the city, and here, at the command of his companion, the driver pulled up his horses.

"Get out here, and wait until I come back."

"How long will you be away?"

"An hour, maybe," and he had driven off like a flash.

The driver walked about in perturbation for an hour, fearful one moment that he would never see his team again, and at another that he had succeeded in getting himself into a position of extreme danger.

In the midst of his dismal forebodings he was overjoyed to see the cab approaching at a rapid rate, the horses reeking with sweat.

"Are you the man that owns the rig?" cried the driver, in tones that the owner had never heard before.

"I guess so."

"Then take the dodrotted thing off my hands, for

I'm tired drivin' it. A fellow ran across me back there a couple of miles—he was drivin' the concern—and says, 'I'll give you two dollars if you drive this team into town, provided you're goin' in that direction,' and he named this place. As I was comin' to town anyway, I concluded I couldn't earn two dollars any easier, and secure a free ride, too; so I hopped on as he hopped off, and here we are. Sure the team is your'n?"

"Yes, it's mine," snapped the owner, examining his belongings preparatory to his departure, while the stranger made his way to the nearest saloon.

"A nice dodge to elude capture if a policeman had been here waiting to take him in. Guess he didn't trust me very far, or he'd have druv the cab back himself."

What had become of Myra?

After Charlie Pitts, for such one of the kidnappers was, had assumed the duties of driver, the horses sped along on the same way that Stark, Howard, and Scott had taken a few nights before.

In less than half an hour they drew up in an obscure wooded place, and Myra, who had in the meantime been gagged, was removed, set on her feet, and ordered to go along with them quietly.

Clell Miller, agreeable to previous arrangements, mounted the box, turned the horses' heads toward town, and drove away, while Myra, knowing that resistance would be vain, did as she was told, noticing all the while that the party was pursuing a most circuitous route, doubtless intended to blind any possible pursuers as to their final destination.

A gloomy building was finally seen in the darkness, and into the dreary place Myra was led, just as Theo Howard had been, and in the same room where he had first been placed, she was also seated, and the same smoky lamp began shortly to cast the same dim rays over the same moldy floor, dirty walls, and cobwebby ceiling.

As Myra's eyes fell upon her maid she started back in horror.

"Are you a prisoner, too?" she asked, as she looked fearfully around the apartment.

"Oh, no, Miss Ferry; you see I'm free, don't you?" with a careless laugh.

Seeing that the girl was completely bewildered, she added, maliciously:

"This is one of the rewards of meddling with what does not concern you."

"I fail to grasp your meaning, Mary."

"Oh, you'll have abundant time to digest the whole situation. It will come to you by degrees; you will be thoroughly initiated by the time you are through with us."

"You have been acting apart to-day?"

"Exactly, and a most enjoyable one. Your mother is such a sympathetic old lady, and fell quite in love with me. In fact, I really believe I almost captivated you."

"What is the object of this outrage?" asked Myra, assuming what calmness she could.

"You know Detective Belton, of course?"

"Well?"

"You are supposed to possess some of the information that he held."

"Held?"

"Just so. Which means that your slippery friend of many disguises has taken his departure to a better world, at least to a world in which disguises are unknown. The fact is, he assumed a disguise just once too often entered my house in his meddling way, and consequently paid the penalty."

"This can't be true!" gasped Myra, credulous despite her assertion.

"Perfectly true, unless the gentleman can live under water, and that, I believe, is not one of his accomplishments."

"An awful fate."

"But a deserved one. Now, as he is disposed of, let us turn our attention to yourself. What discovery did you make at poor Howard's grave that night you visited it?"

"I shall not answer any questions."

"Very well; but as you were not brought here to be questioned solely, your reticence will be cheerfully passed by. We are about to remove you to

another apartment which lies in a more central portion of the building, and from which you will be less likely to escape should you be so inclined."

With these words Myra was led out of the room, and along the hall toward the rear of the house.

Here a room was entered, very similar to the one in which Theo was incarcerated, except that it was provided with a more comfortable bed.

"This," said Irene, as she was about to take her departure, "will be your home for a time. Make yourself mistress of the situation. You will not have much in this lonely place to amuse you, but meditation will be doubtless beneficial to one of your disposition."

"How long shall I be compelled to remain in this place?" with a shudder of dread at her gloomy surroundings.

"That depends. For my part, I hope it will not be long, as I am anxious to leave this part of the country, and that as soon as possible. Before I go, by the way, I want to tell you that I knew your lover when he was alive; was quite intimate with him, in fact, just previous to his death. Oh, these men! You can't trust them!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

MYRA'S ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE.

Myra's cheeks blanched.

"Why do you try to make me miserable with your vile insinuations?" her indignation rising in defense of her lover.

"I am simply relating history. I thought you would be delighted to learn of his last acts, such a solace would the recital prove in your grief."

"I wish to know nothing. Even if it were the truth, it would do no good to ascertain that Theo was no better than he should have been, though that I will never believe."

"Trustful woman! How happy are they who will not listen to the truth; yet this is a matter which you should know."

"If he is dead, what good would it do to resurrect such painful stories, whether they be truthful or not?"

"Just as you say, for I presume you would not listen if I did tell you, so I think it high time to leave you to ruminate over the virtuous qualities of the deceased."

With a mocking word of farewell the heartless Irene was gone.

Myra sank on the bed in a passion of grief.

Torn from the arms of her fond parents, snatched with violence from her luxurious home, and forced to exist in this vile place, it seemed to her at the time that death would be infinitely preferable to life.

Then Theo, with his tender love and oft-spoken hopes, arose before her imagination—Theo might be alive somewhere, waiting for freedom and a joyful reunion with his promised wife; she would live for him, she would escape and find him herself, if no one else would help her.

Slowly, in spite of her brave resolution, the night dragged along; she could not sleep on account of her strange situation and the fearful forebodings that harassed her; but as a glow of light began to show in the east she dropped off into a calm slumber, in which she dreamed that she was not only at home, but that Theo was with her again, his cruel death a mistake, his undying love a glorious certainty.

In this room there was one window that opened through the massive stone wall, and it was heavily barred with pieces of iron; but bars of iron could not keep out the penetrating rays of the sun which fell in a warm glow upon the opposite wall.

Myra slept soundly for three hours, and as she awoke her eyes fell upon this welcome visitor to her prison.

She took it as a good omen, and rising from her couch she made her toilet as well as she was able. She then sat down, and awaited the issue of events.

In a short time Irene put in an appearance, and

with the same mocking smile as of old bade her prisoner a good-morning.

What a wonderful change she exhibited from the modest waiting-maid of yesterday!

"How well you look to-day. Like a very queen, in fact. By the way, that is a pet name which has often been applied to your humble visitor. Your lover was accustomed to call me Queenie, a name which I thought was extremely pretty, coming as it did from his lips."

Myra paid no attention to this thrust, her calm face not giving any sign that it had even been heard.

"You evidently don't believe me?"

"What is your errand?"

"To bring you your breakfast. You must really excuse our lack of hospitality, which at the present is unavoidable. Our larder is almost empty, but we have great hopes that it will shortly be replenished to overflowing. And whose money do you imagine will bring about this magic change?"

"It does not interest me in the least."

"But it doubtless will when I tell you that our good fortune comes to us through Theo Howard. Of course, my dear woman, you look incredulous—I expected that; but incredulity does not obliterate truth. As you have nothing else to do, just listen to a charming story which has the additional recommendation of being all true, and which in the telling will not interfere with the progress of the plot, because its consummation can scarcely be prevented now."

With this introduction Irene began the relation of the story as has been narrated in these pages, omitting all reference to Theo's experiences after his supposed death and burial; and Myra was forced to believe when she saw the conspiracy in all its immensity.

"But what will be done with me?" she asked, quaking at heart on account of her deadly peril.

"Oh, the band will decide your fate," the other replied, quietly; "I have nothing to do with that. Only pray that the kindest and best behaved one of

the eight will select you as the partner of his joys and sorrows."

She soon went away, leaving Myra to the poor breakfast that had been placed before her.

All day the lonely girl sat in the uncomfortable chair, or paced the room, momentarily fearing the entrance of one of the outlaws, as that of a savage animal, but not until evening was she disturbed, and then Irene came in with her supper.

But little was said between them, and Irene soon disappeared.

Another night of weary, wakeful vigil, and then another beautiful day had begun; but Myra was still a prisoner.

After a breakfast that was inferior both in quantity and quality, the girl set about putting her room into something like a semblance of order. Her couch was stirred up and aired, and then a few pieces of rubbish that lay about the floor were thrown into one corner on a pile of moldy straw.

"Maybe there is some implement in that corner, by means of which I can free myself," she thought, as she began to move the straw about with her foot, thereby raising a cloud of dust and mold.

She reached the floor, however, without finding anything more than a few sticks not exceeding a foot in length.

But the most important discovery she made was the fact that underneath this filth the floor had rotted away, until it would scarcely support her weight.

The rain had crept in through a leak above and saturated the rubbish, which in turn had carried the process of decomposition into the wood.

Pausing a moment to still the loud beating of her heart, Myra seized one of the heaviest of the sticks, and beat away the decayed portion of the floor, finally making an opening large enough to allow her body to pass through.

The plaster and laths of the ceiling belonging to the room underneath were thus exposed, and a few determined blows soon disposed of that obstruction.

Protruding her head through the aperture just

made, she attempted to explore the new chamber, but the light was so dim that she could define nothing.

It was unoccupied.

Breathing her thanks to Heaven for what she believed was a means of escape, she quickly restored that corner of her room to something like its original appearance, and then awaited the coming of night, when she proposed to put her plan into execution.

She knew that there would be little chance for her to leave the building unperceived while the day lasted, but was almost confident that she could find her way out, and reach a place of safety under the friendly cover of night.

All day long she paced the floor in restlessness, her cheeks flushed with excitement and the hope of escape, yet dreading every moment that some fatal interruption would come.

At dusk Irene came in with the scanty supper, but stayed only a few minutes.

In an hour complete darkness had fallen over the place, and Myra, through the narrow window, could see one bright star that seemed to beckon her to liberty.

Waiting no longer, she thrust the rubbish aside, uttered a fervent prayer for help, and gathering her dress closely about her form, slipped through the opening, at the same time holding on with both hands.

For a moment or two she dangled wildly in the air, and then let go her hold.

She dropped on the floor a little shaken, but uninjured, and then began to examine the apartment, which she found to be a basement room, and much more miserable than the one she had just left.

The door was open, and she passed out into what appeared to be a hall, at one end of which was a flight of stairs.

By feeling her way cautiously, she succeeded in reaching the floor above, and found herself in another hall, where there was a dim light.

To her horror she discovered a group of men

seated at the front door; the very men who had abducted her.

Escape in that direction was cut off.

Back she turned, sick at heart, and passed slowly down the stairs, determined to search for a different exit, but at that moment she heard a succession of shouts from the party she was just attempting to avoid, and doubted not that she had been discovered.

She waited not an instant, however, as every second's delay was only the more dangerous to her, and turned toward the left.

The first door resisted her attempts to open it; it was fastened on the inside. The second was also fastened, but to her joy she saw that the bolts were on the side next to her.

A moment's hasty fumbling withdrew them, and she entered.

The occupant, for there was one, made a movement of some kind, and exclaimed in the familiar and loved tones which had once been so much to her:

"Who's there?"

Her heart stopped its wild and tumultuous beating.

"Theo!" she cried, and then fell lifeless to the floor.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE VISIT TO DOCTOR HINDS.

As the engine drew up near the depot at B—— Jim Younger joined his brother.

"I had quite an experience back there."

"How's that?" asked Bob.

"I just dropped an extra passenger."

"Who was he?"

"Belton, I guess, dressed up as a tramp."

"How did you get rid of him?"

"Let a lump of coal fall on him. If he isn't dead by this time it is because he must have alighted on a feather bed."

Leaping from the engine the two brothers made a

dash for the train which was just on the point of starting, and left the astonished engineer to make such explanation as he chose to the railroad officials, as well as to lose the fifty dollars which had been promised him.

"Safe at last!" cried Bob, as the two secured a seat.

"I'll breathe easy only when I have the money right in my hands; then I'd defy all the powers that be to wrest it from my grasp," remarked Jim, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"If we were but certain that Belton has passed in his checks. He's likely to turn up at the last moment and spoil all of our plans. By the way, it was only through a miracle that he, in my estimation, escaped the fate that Irene intended for him. She was certain he was done for that time."

"Well, if he escaped instant annihilation a few minutes ago, then I'll say he's death-proof."

In due time the couple arrived in Chicago, and went directly to the residence of Dr. Hinds.

"Is the doctor at home?" asked Bob of the servant who appeared in answer to his knock.

"Yes, sir; just step in."

Ten minutes later Mr. Hinds, an ordinary looking but kindly-faced man, entered the room.

"Do you know me, doctor?" asked Bob, with a smile.

"Do I know you? Of course I do, Mr. Younger," giving him a hearty shake of the hand. "But I was scarcely expecting to see you here."

"And I scarcely expected a few days ago to be here."

"A sudden errand, then?"

"You are right. I have a claimant for the Howard fortune."

Dr. Hinds' eye for the first time rested upon Bob's companion.

"I understood from your letters that Mr. Howard met his death a few days since; in fact, I read the account in the daily papers," said the physician, doubtfully.

"Oh, yes; the young man met a sudden as well as

an awful fate. I do not remember of ever having heard of a sadder case."

"You are positive of his identity with Samuel Howard's nephew?"

"Positive; I have all the proofs with me; but unfortunately, there is another serious phase to the matter."

"And that?"

"Theo Howard died deeply in debt. It was a strange condition of affairs to find, on examining his accounts, that he owed a hundred thousand dollars to one person."

"Is it possible? And he so young?"

"The saddest part of a very sad affair, in my estimation. It seems that he was seized by a speculating mania, and on being successful at first he went deeper, intending to secure a fortune at one stroke, but lost all. This gentleman, Julian Stark, can explain the affair at greater length than I am able," looking with a deep frown at the person indicated.

Julian Stark, otherwise Jim Younger, bowed stiffly, as if offended at the words of introduction.

"Mr. Younger evidently intends to throw discredit upon me and my business methods," he said, angrily; "but I wish both you and him to understand that the debt was contracted in a legitimate way, and will be collected in like manner."

"Let him collect it, then," said Bob, in an equally angry tone, and seizing his hat he was about to withdraw, when the doctor in some trepidation stopped him.

"Cannot we settle this matter among us three, gentlemen? You will remember that Mr. Howard's distinct wish was a settlement without going to law about it."

"I would prefer to have nothing to do with it," said Bob, firmly. "Dispose of it to suit yourselves."

"But how about the proofs?"

"Oh, the proofs are all right. Theo owed Stark, and his signature appended to the note in the gentleman's possession is genuine. This man is Stark; of that you need have no doubt, much as I dislike to tell you so. As I knew Theo was in debt to him, I

was obliged to impart the information that a fortune had fallen to the young man. Having not a relative in the world to whom the money in turn could be bequeathed, I thought it only just that this man should have his dues, though I still firmly believe that he used undue influence in persuading young Howard to go into speculation."

"He was of age," said the supposed Stark, grimly.

"May I see you a moment alone, Mr. Younger?" inquired Dr. Hinds.

"Certainly," and he led his visitor to a side apartment.

"Now, what do you think of the case?" he asked, anxiously.

"There is no doubt of the matter in my mind. He can collect the money if he goes to law."

"Then it would be better to pay him at once?"

"Don't be in too big a hurry about it. Wait until you see and examine his proofs, then there will be time to pay him what money he claims."

"I shall trust considerably to your advice, though if he is Stark, and Howard owed him that amount, there need be no delay in handing it over."

"How much did the elder Howard leave?"

"A hundred and three thousand dollars."

"Stark will make a pretty clean sweep of the plater."

"Exactly. Had the debt been larger you and I would have some little difficulty in retaining our share of the money."

"By the way, doctor, would it be too much trouble to give me my portion now? My business is in such shape that I cannot remain long; and as I have not the least idea when I shall be in Chicago again, I might as well get it now provided it is convenient to you, and you are reasonably sure that everything is straight."

"Wait a moment, and I'll get it for you," and the innocent physician was out of the room and up stairs in a moment, unaware that Bob had followed him just far enough to locate the room he entered.

An interval of five minutes found him back, with a roll of money in his hand.

"Count this," he said.

Bob did so, and found everything all right.

"Now I shall leave you to deal with this man," he remarked, in taking his departure. "Remember, though, that if you are not satisfied with his proofs, keep him waiting until you are. Even go to Minneapolis and make him prove his identity."

"I believe that will be the better plan," said the doctor, as he shook hands with Bob; "I think I shall follow your suggestion."

Dr. Hinds shut the door as Bob Younger ran down the steps, and went immediately to finish his interview with the other caller; but Bob, as if he had forgotten a very important matter, suddenly stopped when he reached the pavement, turned and ran lightly up the steps, opened the door in the most matter-of-fact though noiseless way, and entered the house.

He stepped swiftly along the hall, and up the stairs without seeing any one. It was but a moment until he was in the room in which the doctor had obtained the money, and was searching every nook and corner for the treasure.

An oblong tin box stood on the upper shelf of a cupboard; Bob took it down.

It was locked.

A wrench of his strong fingers raised the lid.

A pile of gold occupied one compartment, and the rest of the space was taken up by bills of various denominations.

This was the treasure.

It took considerable nerve to take this peculiar looking box and walk unconcernedly down the stairs out into the open air, but the robber possessed it, though his heart may have beaten a trifle faster while he was about the task.

At the end of fifteen minutes he was at the depot waiting for the next train to carry him to his final destination.

Minute after minute passed, and Jim, who was also to leave on this train, did not put in an appearance.

Bob began to grow rather uneasy, imagining that

his brother had fallen into the strong grasp of the law, and meditating the best way of disposing of the contents of his box.

The train drew up at last, and Bob entered it.

He had concluded that the situation did not justify waiting any longer for his brother, and hoped now that the train would pull out.

Just as the wheels began to revolve an athletic figure pushed itself through the crowd, and clambered up the steps.

It was Jim Younger.

In the meantime Dr. Hinds had rejoined the claimant of the hundred thousand dollars, and was engaged with that worthy in looking over the papers that established Theo Howard's identity, and the note of his indebtedness to Julian Stark.

"Yes, that all looks fair enough, Mr. Stark," said the doctor, a little uneasy, "but of course you could not object or think it hard of me should I insist on making a more extended investigation?"

"What more convincing proofs are required than these papers?" asked the other, darkly.

"The papers, as I said, seem to be all right, but I have determined to go to Minneapolis and see for myself."

"A plot between you two."

"No plot, only a safeguard. It might be the means of preventing the execution of a premeditated crime."

Jim laughed.

"Have it your own way, my friend; I can wait. When will you want to start?"

"In the morning."

"Good! I'll meet you at the depot," and with a mysterious smile the visitor had departed.

Ten minutes went by, and the doctor, who was looking over the documents, was startled by a thundering ring at the door.

He arose hastily to answer the summons, when the door of his office was rudely thrown open, and a tramp, one of the most forlorn-looking tramps he had ever laid eyes on, stalked in.

"What means this?" cried the doctor, in astonishment.

"Are you Dr. Hinds?"

"I am. Who are you?"

"Have you had a couple of visitors laying claim to some money?"

"How can that concern you?" said the other, stiffly.

The tramp made a leap at him.

"Answer me at once, or I'll throttle you!"

"I had," he said, backing away prudently.

"Then if you gave them any money you have been duped. They are nothing more nor less than thieves and robbers."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DRAWING THE NET TIGHTER.

Dr. Hinds gave utterance to a gasp of alarm.

"What proof have you of that?"

"The simple proof that I know it. Tell me quickly what they did. See, I have the proper authority for proceeding thus," and turning up the lapel of his coat he exhibited his badge.

"Two men, one of whom I know, called on me a few minutes ago, claiming that the fortune belonging to Theo Howard, by virtue of bequest from Samuel Howard, was almost wholly due Julian Stark, who was the one I did not know."

"They presented the proofs?"

"They did."

"And you gave them the money?"

"I did not."

Belton breathed more freely.

"When are they to come back?"

"To-morrow. That is, one of them."

"How about the other?"

"He left on a plea of pressing business."

Belton meditated with lowering brow for a few moments.

"You are telling me all?"

"Not quite. The testator directed that Mr.

Younger and myself were to keep a thousand dollars each in case we should find the heir. I gave that gentleman his share just before he left."

"You have the rest yet?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"It is an easy matter to find out," said the doctor. "Remain here," not fully satisfied that the tramp was what he claimed to be.

When he reappeared his face was blanched with some uncontrollable emotion.

"Well?" said Belton, quietly.

"It is gone!"

"I was afraid so. While you were talking with one, the other, having evidently located the treasure in some way, ran up, seized and made way with it. Now we must take immediate steps to have the scoundrels arrested. Let us go at once to the depot, as they will make an effort to get out of town at the earliest opportunity."

The couple were at the station in a very few minutes, but as Belton had feared, they were too late.

The train had left but ten minutes previous.

The detective made particular inquiries of the officials in regard to the robbers, and obtained the information that a man in the garb of a clergyman had entered the train, and that he carried a tin box in his hand.

"The same!" said the doctor, with a gasp.

"Now there is only one way left for us to pursue if we are to capture those fellows; we must use the telegraph. If they have no idea of our being so hot on their trail it will be easy to overhaul them; but I am afraid they will take every precaution to escape arrest. And the fact that it is dark will be very much in their favor."

A dispatch was immediately sent forward to the second point at which the train was accustomed to stop, as it had already passed its first stopping place.

The reply was received in due time that the train had been thoroughly searched, but no persons answering such descriptions were found on it,

Belton uttered an exclamation of disgust as he turned away.

"How long will it be until the next train leaves?"

"Four hours."

At the specified time the tramp, arrayed in more becoming habiliments, entered the train, and was borne swiftly away on the trail.

But how did Belton escape the awful fate that had been intended for him?

It was indeed a Providential deliverance from instant death.

The blow which dislodged the detective from his perch had come sideways, and thrown him so that he fell clear of the bridge.

Whirling through the air as if shot from a catapult, he by the merest chance alighted in the channel of the stream, and by the time he arose to the surface the cooling water had restored him to consciousness.

Striking out boldly, he reached the shore, clambered up the bank, and at once started for the station.

Finding that a freight train was just leaving, he boarded it, and rode to the next stopping place, where he succeeded in catching a fast train which reached Chicago about an hour and a half after the arrival of the train the Younger boys had taken.

He made his way directly to Dr. Hinds' residence, with the result as has been stated.

He was now engaged in a chase which promised to give him much trouble; but he was possessed of that untiring perseverance which had made him so uniformly successful heretofore, and he felt that perseverance would land him victor in this instance.

If he could only have had the assistance of Jones, he would have been sanguine of a speedy termination of the matter; and he hoped that his assistant had gone back to Minneapolis where he could now be of great service.

To his joy, on his arrival in that city, he found Jones in waiting for him.

The meeting was a welcome one to both, and it

took but a few moments to acquaint each other of what had happened.

"And you are sure they haven't arrived?"

"Sure."

"They must have gotten off close to Chicago, then."

"Yes, if they left the cars at all."

"They certainly left the cars before they arrived here; maybe a few miles back."

"A sad thing took place after we left Minneapolis," said Jones, scarcely knowing how to break the news of Myra's disappearance.

"What is that?"

"Miss Ferry has been abducted."

"Nonsense!"

"It is only too true."

"Then they must have known more about our visit to the cemetery than we imagined."

"Yes; it was evidently done by the same gang, for I haven't the least doubt that the servant girl who enticed her away was none other than our old acquaintance, the slippery Irene."

He then related the story of the abduction so far as he was acquainted with it, and while they slowly left the depot they made many a futile attempt at theorizing upon the whereabouts of the bold and successful robbers, as well as the situation of the unfortunate Theo, if, indeed, he were alive.

"It's like hunting for a needle in a haystack," said the disconsolate Jones, "or for a flea, more likely; for a needle will keep still, and a flea won't."

Belton smiled.

"We'll succeed yet, my boy. If you've as much determination about you as I have, you'll never say die. And we're just as likely to run across them now as when we were seated beside them."

"Do you think they will be likely to come back to this place?"

"I think so. The gang, you know, is in this locality, and the division of the spoils will probably occur close to if not in the city. At least there is one way left us even if it should prove slow."

"Shadow the Queen?"

"Exactly; though I ought to leave that to you, seeing that my experience with her majesty has been singularly unfortunate."

"Singularly lucky, too, considering the serious situations you got yourself out of."

"Hist! Do you see that old apple woman?"

"Yes, and there's something familiar about her, too."

"I don't doubt it, taking into consideration the fact that she is the very lady we have been discussing."

"Is it to be a shadow?"

"Nothing else. It will never do to lose sight of her now."

"But she'll get on to us."

"We must keep out of her sight, then; here's a cab; we'll just hire the driver to follow her at a safe distance, while we can take such observations from the vehicle as may be necessary."

The cabman was hailed, and the couple took their seats, after giving the Jehu the requisite directions.

The old lady entered a store and the driver pulled up his horses at the opposite curbstone.

Leaning down he addressed Belton.

"How far shall I follow the young lady?"

"What young lady?" asked the detective in surprise.

"The young lady I've been follerin' the last half hour. Hain't I got eyes as well as anybody?"

"May be you can tell me her name," said Belton, with a mysterious smile.

"I can't do that, but I know something about her, all the same."

"Tell us."

Cabby winked very wisely.

"Give me the lay you're on, stranger, and mebbe I will."

"We have reason to think that she is of the shady order."

"I guess you are a leetle more than right. The jade is one of a party that was the cause of one of my horses dyin' by fast drivin', and as fifty dollars

is no price fur sich a vallyble animal, I must git my pay in some way, even if it is by peachin' on a feller critter."

"A young lady was abducted night before last, and we're after the criminals who accomplished the deed."

The driver slapped his thigh triumphantly.

"Exactly! I'm the feller that can p'int you in the right direction. I know all about it."

"How's that?"

"Well, I'm not goin' to be so fast in tellin' you, unless you grant me certain favors."

"Money?"

"Not exactly money, though I'd be glad enough to have that. The fact is, I was concerned in it a little myself."

"And you want exemption from arrest on account of complicity? Well, you shall have it, and we'll find some way of making up the loss caused by the death of your animal."

"Good! Two evenings ago, a chap comes to me, and says he 'Can I engage you and your cab to-night?' Says I 'What fur?' And he says 'Oh fur a little drive. We'll give you fifty dollars fur your services—you to ask no questions and to do as you're told.' Well, I thought that a ruther easy way of makin' fifty dollars, and I at once fell in with his offer."

The remainder of the story has already been told the reader.

"How far do you suppose they drove in the time they were away?"

"They may have went as far as four miles."

"Are you acquainted with the lay of the land in that direction?"

"No."

"I'll give you five dollars to drive me out along the road they took."

"I'm your man."

"Now, Bill, you keep your eye on the old woman, and make a report of what she does and where she goes."

The driver departed with his passenger, and

obeying a suggestion from Belton, allowed his team to take their own way.

For an hour he drove slowly along, reaching a wilder section of country, until suddenly the lead horse stopped.

The driver sprang out, and to his satisfaction saw the tracks of a vehicle, presumably his own, that had turned at this point.

"How has my suggestion worked?" asked Belton, sticking his head out of the window.

"Like a charm. I am purty certain this is the place where they stopped, and went back after accomplishin' their business."

"Very well," said the detective, as he alighted; "just drive down the road half a mile and back. In that time I shall have reconnoitered a little."

A careful examination discovered the existence of footprints leading from the side of the road into the neighboring field.

Belton followed these, being very careful to keep under cover and thus guard against surprise.

A short walk brought him within view of a deserted stone building which he had never seen before.

Slipping into a thicket near by, he took an easy position and waited.

In a little while he had the satisfaction of seeing a figure come to the door, but as it was a person with whom he was not familiar, it gave him no direct conclusion as to his surmises.

After waiting a few minutes he decided to go back to the roadside.

Here he found the driver, to whom he paid the money he had promised, and then dismissed him. By the time he had reached his hiding place again, the sun was half way down the horizon. This was a fact with which he was greatly pleased, as it would soon be dark enough to continue his explorations, though he felt quite sure that he was finally on the right track.

He had sat there perhaps an hour when he saw approaching the house in the same direction he had

come the figure of Irene still in the guise of the old apple woman.

"At last!" he murmured. "The curtain is about to rise for the final scene in this strange drama!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

"THE POLICE ARE COMING."

The sharp eye of Belton discovered another figure, and a familiar one as well, evidently dogging the footsteps of Irene, and keeping well out of sight.

"Ah! the young lady has to all intents and appearances been outwitted this time unless she is playing a game of her own, which I hardly imagine is the case."

Belton kept perfectly still until Irene reached the house, and he then cautiously gave Jones a signal which was immediately answered.

A minute later the two detectives were together.

"You've tracked her to the lair," said Belton.

"Yes, and such a tramp as she did lead me."

"She didn't walk all the way from town?"

"Oh, no; but I did, and that's what makes me feel like growling."

"I'm sorry you are tired out, but we've got her and most likely our other prey located, though that has yet to be determined. Doubtless Myra and Theo also are located somewhere in the building."

"Well, what's the programme?"

"The whole gang ought to be captured."

"With two men?"

"Not exactly. One of us must go back and secure sufficient force to do this. The other will stay and gain what information is possible, so that we can act at once on the arrival of the posse. You may, therefore, return to town, report at headquarters, and secure at least twelve men, for we have a most desperate set of fellows to deal with; but recollect what a feather it will be in our hats to capture the most noted collection of robbers that America has ever produced."

Jones at once departed on his errand, while Belton

kept his post of observation until dusk without discovering so much as a sign of a human being.

When he concluded it to be safe to do so, he moved in a circle about the building, and when he arrived at the rear he observed a low entrance, which, on account of an occasional snort or stamp he heard in that direction, he supposed must lead to that part of the structure used as a stable.

Once he heard the voice of some person who was engaged in feeding the animals, and he concluded to remain at his post until the man retired.

In a few minutes he distinguished a dark form come out of the entry and close the door.

Leaving this point the fellow approached another door in the center of the building, and disappeared within.

Belton now walked boldly from his ambush, and tried the same door; it was locked.

Passing to a window, he raised the sash, and noiselessly crept in.

Listening a moment for a sign of the presence of some one, he began to explore the room, but found it devoid of everything except an abundance of dirt.

He left the apartment by means of an open door, and went on his way.

After a time he heard the sound of voices, and perceived at once that he was on the point of making one of the grandest discoveries of his life, even should he not be successful in bagging his game.

The room in which he was now located was close to the main hall, and in this hall men to the number of five were seated in company with Irene.

"I'll enjoy myself just now in listening," thought Belton, as he crept closer to the door.

"Well, boys, this is getting devilish tiresome," remarked a voice. "If we don't hear from them to-night, my vote is to go forward on this other business at once."

"So say I, Cole," said another, "and let Bob and Jim join us when they get through. The next thing we know somebody will drop on to our hiding place and attack us with a whole army."

"You haven't any idea how near right you are," thought the detective, with a grim smile.

"It will just about take an army to wipe us out," said he who bore the appellation of Cole.

"So," thought Belton, "the two brothers haven't returned, but are momentarily expected. One satisfactory piece of information, at all events."

"What shall be done with the prisoners?" some one inquired.

"Shoot 'em!" said another, savagely.

"Hold on, Jesse. If you're going to do any shooting, just leave the young lady to me, for I can use her to better advantage than to make a target out of her."

"How is that," Jesse asked, with a careless laugh.

"Hold her for a heavy ransom. I'll wager the old gentleman would come down handsomely with the boodle."

"That might do, provided we can take her along easily enough, but we are not to be burdened with any extra men, let me tell you."

One of the men who had been stationed outside as guard now came in with the statement that two men were approaching, presumably Bob and Jim.

The party looked to their arms to be ready for any possible emergency, but as they all supposed, the intruders turned out to be the persons mentioned, and were received with shouts of welcome.

"We got there!" cried Bob, dropping into a chair, "but it was a tough job all the way through."

"Is this the swag?" asked Jesse, tapping the tin box with his revolver.

"You bet! and lots of it, too. Think of twelve thousand apiece, and the fun it will bring. Doesn't it make your mouth water?"

"Let's see the color of it; let's divide it," suggested Jesse. "It's a long time since I've seen so much boodle."

"Give us our supper first," exclaimed Bob. "By the way," he added, with a grin intended for the delectation of Irene, who formed one of the party, "I thought you had disposed of Belton."

"So I did."

"Well, he's come to life again."

"Nonsense!"

"Nothing of the kind. Oh, he's a slick one! He got on to our plans in some way, and accompanied by a pal of his, he rode in the same train with us while we were on our way to Chicago. Only by accident did we penetrate their disguises, and then, as if he had divined this, Belton got off the cars at a certain place, changed his disguise, got on again, and I never would have known it except by another accident. He was now dressed as a tramp, and rode with us for miles until the train was derailed. Jim and I hired an engine to take us to the next station so as to catch a train, as well as to get out of the way of those fellows when, behold you, Belton was finally discovered on the same engine. Jim dropped a lump of coal on him, and he toppled off like a piece of lead; but I wouldn't bet any money that he is dead even now."

"You'd lose it if you did," muttered the listener, with a smile of the utmost satisfaction.

As Bob spoke he raised the lid of the box, and in the uncertain light each eye caught sight of bills and a shining mass of gold.

"Now we'll put it away until after our meal; then we'll divide it, and discuss our next affair."

Bob closed the box, and suddenly opening the door of the room in which Belton had been listening, placed the treasure inside.

It was well that the room was dark, or the detective would inevitably have been discovered.

As it was, he crouched in one corner until Bob had passed out.

In a moment he made up his mind that the money must be saved.

Stealing forward he cautiously raised the lid, and abstracted all the bills, which comprised by far the larger part of the money.

These he stowed away in various parts of his clothing; but how was he to dispose of the gold?

He carefully removed the pieces from the box, and gathering up handfuls of dirt and the plastering

which had fallen from the walls and ceiling, he deliberately filled it to the top.

Taking a pencil and scrap of paper from his pocket he hurriedly scribbled a few words in the darkness, and placing this note on the rubbish, he fastened down the lid.

In his search for the rubbish he ran across an old satchel, which he found in fair condition, and in this he placed the gold and some of the bills.

With the greatest of caution he now retraced his steps, and soon found himself outside.

An old barrel, almost ready to fall to pieces, stood by the side of the house; in this he placed the satchel, and continued on his way, circling about the house so as to intercept the police before they should come too near the building; but in this important move he was too late.

He had not proceeded ten paces when he heard a shot delivered by the guard, who had evidently discovered the approach of some intruder.

The next moment the echoes were startled by the ringing cry:

“To arms, comrades! The police are coming!”

CHAPTER XXX.

BOB YOUNGER'S ESCAPE.

It took but a few minutes for Belton to reach his men.

“Hold!” he cried. “Why were you not more careful in approaching?”

“We thought we were careful,” growled Jones, “but these fellows seem to see through the deepest night. I was certain we made no noise, but they either saw or heard us.”

“The next thing, since they have taken alarm, is to prevent their escape. If we can but surround the building, we may hold them until morning, when we will have a better chance to capture them.”

Hastily selecting four men, Belton led them around the building in order to guard the entrance to the stable, while the remaining men he left in

front of the house to prevent a retreat in that direction.

All had been perfectly quiet within the house after the first alarm, a fact which meant either that the outlaws were waiting an attack, or else had escaped, although the latter supposition was scarcely probable.

But just as Belton and his men turned the corner of the building, he caught sight of the indistinct forms of men arranged about the stable entrance, evidently in the act of mounting.

"Halt and surrender!" cried the detective, drawing his revolver and rushing forward.

A shot which just grazed his cheek was the only answer he received.

The next moment the desperadoes were on their horses, and fleeing like the wind.

Belton's revolver spoke just once before the party was out of sight, but that one shot was effective.

A horse staggered, regained his feet, and then fell, carrying his rider with him.

Hardly had he touched the ground when Belton was on the spot, his hand on the horseman's neck.

He started back in amazement, for he had captured not a man, but a woman.

"The Queen!" he cried.

It was indeed Irene.

She had attempted to escape with the outlaws, and would doubtless have succeeded had not Belton's chance shot disabled her steed.

Partly stunned by the fall, she was unable to defend herself, and fell into the hands of her enemies, an easy prisoner.

In the meantime, hearing the shots and the noise of the horses, the remainder of the detectives joined the party.

"Here, Jones," said Belton, "take charge of this lady while some of us look after the fugitives."

Bill, with much gallantry, escorted the unwilling Irene into the house, where he proceeded, in spite of her indignant remonstrances, to tie her hands.

"What do you mean by this outrage?" she demanded, tearfully.

"I don't mean to be outrageous at all, my dear; but you've made such a reputation for being careless with knives and like weapons, that I don't intend giving you a chance to increase your fame in that direction."

"Chivalrous gentleman!"

"Just so; but then we are going to be safe and snug."

Here Bill turned up the lamp, and then seated himself, patiently waiting for Belton's appearance.

"How much is it worth to allow me to escape accidentally?" asked Irene, breaking the silence, and speaking in coaxing tones.

Her jailer seemed to meditate.

"Well, how much wind can you raise?"

"I'll give you a thousand dollars."

"Got any of it about you?"

"Of course not. Do you think I'd be foolish enough to tell you if I had? But I can get it."

"When you get it," said Bill, indifferently, "then I'll talk with you."

At this moment Belton entered the room with hasty step.

"They've gone. Unfortunately, we are without horses, and under such circumstances pursuit would be useless. I must try another plan.

"Well, your majesty, we meet again," with a bow to Irene, who was staring at him in astonishment.

"You are yet alive?" she gasped.

"Very much so. Never felt more like living in my life than at this moment."

"How have you escaped all those deaths intended for you?"

"Oh, they were intended, were they? Yes, I have come through all right without a scratch to show that I've had a single enemy who wished to compass my destruction. No, I'll amend that statement somewhat. I did get a blow from something that fell off the tender of an engine. It must have been a lump of coal. I imagined it was a mere accident at first, but have since been told that it was intended to put an end to my existence. I am very sorry to

be so determined to live, but if you people persist, you will perhaps gain your point at last."

"I could put an end to you with the greatest of pleasure," said the girl, fiercely.

"In view of my experience with you, that declaration is somewhat superfluous. I am quite willing to take your word for it."

"You've been outgeneraled in the contest, anyhow."

"In what way, pray?"

"In every way. Didn't Julian Stark escape from you?"

"Bob Younger, you mean? Yes, I'll acknowledge that; but I mean to have him yet."

"Success to you! I hope, also, that you will get the money that belongs to Theo Howard, while you are at it."

"Perhaps I shall, though I don't expect to," in significant tones.

"I know you will not," triumphantly. "Julian has it only too safe."

"Jones," said Belton, quietly, "go out to the northeast corner of the house, and in a barrel standing close to that spot you will find a satchel. Bring it here."

Bill was gone two minutes; when he came back he had the satchel.

"In this you might find most of the money that was in Bob Younger's possession for a day, were you allowed to handle it. See, here are the bills, here is the gold that shone so brightly in the presence of you all a few minutes ago. Who has been outwitted in this instance?"

Irene looked stupefied.

"A mere trick!"

"A trick, but a very thorough one. You will remember that the tin box was placed in a side room out of your sight. Well, I was in that room, and it did not take me long to remove the contents. If your friend Julian has carried the box away, he'll find it full of plaster and dirt."

"We're ahead of you in the Miss Ferry affair, anyhow," said the undaunted girl.

"Just for the present, if that was your handiwork. I'm glad I have a confession from you in the presence of witnesses; it will make the fixing of the crime a much simpler matter. It will be only a question of time to obtain knowledge full and complete of her whereabouts."

"In what condition do you expect to find her?"

"Well and hearty."

Irene smiled.

"A most sanguine man, truly. You'll see when you set eyes on her."

Although Belton kept perfectly calm outwardly, her last statement struck him with deadly fear.

"If she has suffered in any way, it will be only the worse for you. Now, my good woman, you can aid me as well as yourself by answering a few plain questions truthfully."

Irene did not reply.

"What is the destination of the band to-night?"

"I must violate no confidences," was the mocking answer. "Perhaps if you read the papers of September 9, you can obtain the necessary information."

"Must I wait until day after to-morrow?"

"Unless you decide to follow them, and that would decidedly be a stern chase."

"Will nothing induce you to give us the information?"

"Nothing except the return of that hundred thousand dollars."

"So be it; but remember you are only making your own fate all the harder. Now, I have another equally important question; where is Theo Howard?"

"Where is his body, you mean?"

"If you like."

"In his grave, of course."

"Nonsense! you and I know better than that."

"Maybe you do; I don't profess to know anything about it."

"You know, at all events, that he is alive; where is he now?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Very well. Now, gentlemen, while Jones and

Marks guard this woman, the rest of us will resolve ourselves into a committee of search, and if I do not much mistake my guess we will find certain parties we want in this very building."

CHAPTER XXXI.

"HOLD, OR I SHOOT!"

As Myra uttered his name in such thrilling tones, Theo started back in amazement.

The next moment he was on his knees by her side kissing her face, her hair, her eyes.

"Oh, that I were rid of these shackles!" he cried, in desperation, dashing his hands against the floor. "Here is my love, helpless, perhaps dying, and I scarcely able to move hand or foot in her behalf. Myra, tell me that you are still alive."

The girl came to life with a faint sigh, but on opening her eyes in the darkness saw nothing.

Slowly memory came to her aid, and she at last realized what had happened.

Her hands wandered out in the black gloom which surrounded her, and touched the silent form at her side.

Tenderly the soft arms crept about his neck, and the welcome whisper came from her parted lips:

"I knew it was you!"

"I am sorry that I cannot give you a warmer reception," said the dear voice to her; "you see that I am not my own master."

Myra clung to her lover with hysterical but not grief-stricken sobs, and Theo allowed her to calm herself without interrupting the flow of her refreshing tears.

"I knew you were not dead," she said after a while.

"Who thought I was, darling?"

"Don't you know anything about it? Everybody was satisfied that you were in your grave more than a week ago."

Theo seemed at a loss to express his amazement.

"This seems very strange to me, Myra."

"Yes, my poor boy," as her hands caressed his face, "it is strange, but you shall hear of stranger things than that. Who has been your best friend, Theo?"

"You, of course."

The soft hands gently chided him.

"And so you put me in the list of your friends only?"

"If my arms were but free I'd show you," with a happy, oh, so happy, laugh.

"Well, guess again."

"I should say Julian Stark."

"Of course you would; but what would you think were I to tell you that he has been your worst enemy?"

Theo was surprised beyond measure.

"Of course I would believe you."

"Believe me, then, Theo. Julian Stark, which is only a name adopted for the occasion, has been the cause of all this trouble and misery to which we have both been subjected."

Theo was silent.

"This is an awful blow," he murmured after a little. "It is almost enough to shake my faith in humanity."

Myra crept closer to him.

"Let me save you from such a condition as that. There are many true people, in spite of Julian Stark."

"And you are one of them!"

He did not realize how true those words were then, but he discovered it all in good time.

"Now tell me," he said, "how it is I find you here? Have you been a prisoner, too?"

"Alas, yes! But, Theo, I have just escaped, and I am mortally afraid of falling into their clutches again. Let us get away from this dreadful place while we can."

"I agree with you; but we shall have difficulty, for there are no less than seven or eight men about the building."

Taking Theo's arm in hers, Myra felt her way along until she came to the door. She then went for-

ward cautiously the length of the basement floor until she came to the wall.

To her joy Myra here found a door, and on undoing the fastenings she found herself in a part of the building which the outlaws were using for a stable.

"Could you ride one of these horses?" she whispered.

"I am afraid not. Besides, we would only be losing time by experimenting. We are momentarily in danger of discovery."

They had just reached the stable door when a shot was fired.

"Quick!" cried Theo, "they must have discovered us!" and they hurried away from the place, going they knew not whither.

A few minutes later a succession of shots and the shouts of men were heard, and almost before they were aware of what had taken place a party of horsemen had ridden upon them.

The foremost rider, Bill Chadwell, observed them as they were trying to get out of the way, and with a shout he leaned over and struck the helpless Theo a blow that stretched him on the ground; then leaping from his steed he seized Myra, and threw her across Jesse's horse in front of that worthy. The double deed had been committed so quickly that there was scarce a pause in the progress of the party, and in a few seconds the sounds of the retreating hoofs had ceased.

Myra gave vent to a piercing scream at the treatment accorded her lover and the recapture of herself, but a surly threat uttered by Jesse served to quiet her for the time.

While all this took place Belton and his men were ransacking the old house from top to bottom, and, of course, not meeting with the success they had anticipated.

When the search had been completed and not a sign of Theo or Myra was found, Belton returned to Jones with a mystified look on his countenance, much to Irene's satisfaction.

"This is most mysterious," he remarked in low

tones. "I don't know what to make of it; for I am morally certain that they were kept here as prisoners, yet there are no direct proofs that they were here at all. Now, if they were here, how did they get away? They certainly did not accompany the bandits; therefore they must have escaped."

"What's to be done, then?"

"I shall appoint five men to escort Miss Irene to police headquarters; the remainder I shall send home with the exception of yourself. You and I will follow the gang, simply to locate their direction and the possible object they may have in view."

Calling the men together, he detailed five of the most trustworthy to conduct Irene with the utmost caution to the place indicated, and then dismissed the others.

In ten minutes the old house was silent.

With the aid of a dark lantern the couple picked their way along, having nothing to guide their course but the footprints of the horses.

Suddenly Belton's sharp eyes descried an object lying to one side of the trail, and in an instant he was by its side.

A man, whose face was bespattered with blood, his hands fastened in the clasp of a pair of handcuffs, lay almost face downward.

As the light fell upon him, the detective started back.

"Theo Howard, as I live!"

"Sure?" asked Bill, doubtingly.

"Sure. He is the very picture of the man who has been pointed out to me as Theo Howard. Let us see if he is still alive."

Water was brought and dashed in the young man's face, and in a few minutes his consciousness returned.

Meanwhile, Belton, with a few well directed blows, removed his shackles, and when he arose to his feet, he was at last a free man.

"Myra!" he cried, wildly. "Where is Myra?"

"Where was she?" asked Belton, hurriedly.

"She was with me until those outlaws rode by and

struck me down. I very much fear that they have carried her off."

Belton's heart sank within him.

If she had once more fallen into their hands her case was well nigh desperate.

"If your supposition is correct, we must lose no time in giving chase to the villains. Do you feel strong enough to go with us?"

"I believe I have lost some blood, but I'll go to the end of the earth to defeat them in their diabolical purposes!"

"Here, then, is a revolver. We three must do the best we can, and where we may not be able to use force we must resort to strategy, a game, unfortunately for us, at which they are quite adept themselves."

In spite of the words with which Belton now strove to encourage his companions, all three men felt that the immensity and danger of the task were not lessened.

They started bravely on the way, however, and though their progress was necessarily slow, they were sure that steadiness of purpose and movement would finally accomplish their object.

Belton detailed the plots of the bandits as they journeyed on, and Theo, despite Myra's revelations, was shocked beyond measure to find out the extent of Julian Stark's treachery toward him.

"Should this all turn out well," he said, "I shall be most thankful for my experience of the past few weeks; it has certainly called me to my senses, and shown me the utter folly of the course I was pursuing."

"Yes," remarked Belton, sententiously, "it will at all events show you that a man's best friend is himself, if self is guided by correct principles. I am not able to see how you can fail of securing a happy and prosperous position in life with such a woman as Miss Ferry for your companion and counselor, in addition to your own common sense. She is a most remarkable girl," this last statement being made with the utmost enthusiasm.

"I appreciate your words, and realize how fully they apply to Myra. I think I can say that I owe her wholly my present prospects."

"That is perfectly true. Your death had been fully accepted by every one as perfectly authentic, until she disputed it; and then, to show the depth of her penetration and ability, she proceeded at once to prove the truth of her assertions."

In such converse the night passed until the glow in the east showed the advent of another day.

They were successful in keeping on the trail from the fact that one of the horses had a broken shoe which had left its peculiar mark at each step.

At this point they decided to take a half hour's rest, after which they hastily pushed on, being able to travel rapidly now when aided by the light of day.

In a couple of hours they came to a farmhouse, where they craved a crust of bread and a cup of coffee, offering pay for the same.

A refreshing breakfast was prepared for them, but what they wanted most, information concerning the bandits, was wanting.

Leaving this point, they proceeded on their quest, but progress now was exceedingly slow, owing to the fact that the tell-tale hoof-prints had become almost obliterated, although here and there an occasional one showed quite distinctly.

At eight o'clock they came to a forest, and here the trail left the road.

"Now we shall have plain sailing," said Belton. "I have an idea that they are not far away, and as a consequence we must use the utmost caution, so as to guard against surprise."

Thirty minutes' walking brought them to a clearing in the midst of this wilderness.

In the center stood a house built of logs, but no sign of a person was observable about the place.

A thin ring of smoke, which curled lazily upward from the chimney, however, showed that some one at least had been there lately.

Fearful that the foe might be concealed within, they dared not approach the building; and so for

half an hour they waited in hiding, until, chafing at the delay, Belton determined to make a circuit of the clearing.

When he returned his face was pregnant with tidings.

"We need have no fear of the outlaws, for they have gone. I ran across their trail on the opposite side, and as there were eight horses, we would naturally conclude that eight men rode them. The only thing that remains for us to determine is the question of Miss Ferry's presence in this neighborhood. I am of the opinion that she is concealed about the building before us."

"Let us investigate at once," said Theo, impatiently.

"That is my idea. You and Bill may go to the back of the clearing and approach in that direction, while I shall walk up boldly to the front, and ask for something to eat. If the owner or occupant shows fight we must manage to overpower him without doing any injury. Ah, there he is now," as he observed a man come out of the house and sit down on a log close to the door.

Theo and Bill now departed on their mission, while Belton waited for a few minutes before taking the step which was to determine a very important matter.

He then walked out leisurely from the cover of the trees and approached the house, whistling a jolly air.

The presumable tenant looked up from his occupation of whittling a stick, only to begin again in a fresh spot after satisfying his curiosity, which did not certainly seem to be very highly developed.

"Good-morning, stranger," said Belton, carelessly

"Mornin'."

"How are you fixed for provisions to-day?"

"Purty well I guess."

"I'm hungry."

"Glad to hear it, fur I kin fill ye if ye've got the stuff to fork over."

"That's all right, my friend. I don't take any

man's bread without paying for it. Tell your old woman to hurry up, for I'm most starved."

"Where mought ye hev come from?"

"Walked fifteen miles from the direction of Minneapolis this morning."

"Well, you jist remain hyer, and I'll tell my old gal to git you a bite," and he arose to go toward the door of his habitation.

At that moment he started back in genuine astonishment, for in front of him stood another man whom he had not seen until now.

"You are our prisoner," said Jones. "Will you surrender peaceably?"

If the farmer was surprised, he was not the only one to experience the identical feeling, for at that instant in shrill tones came from the doorway the words:

"Hold, or I shoot!"

In the door stood a fierce-looking woman, with cocked revolver in hand, evidently bent on carrying out her threat.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BOB OPENS THE TIN BOX.

Onward, under the direction of Bill Chadwell, the bandits dashed, pausing not a moment in their mad career as the hoof-beats rang out on the night air.

Mile after mile in unswerving course they passed until they had been in the saddle full five hours.

Disappearing now in the shade of a forest, they soon emerged into a clearing, where Bill dismounted, and approaching a building which occupied the central portion, he knocked upon the door in a peculiar manner with the butt of his revolver.

The noise of bolts was heard, and soon the occupant of the structure stood revealed to the intruders in his night attire.

"Hello, Bill! Is that you?" he asked, a little sleepily. "Quite a party of you, I declare," observing the others for the first time.

"Yes, it's me. Can you accommodate us to-night?"

"Oh, yes, sartinly, ef ye kin sleep on the floor. Ef thar ain't 'nuff floor, the rest kin go out and lay down on the hay in the stable."

"Here is a young lady that is accompanying us," Bill said, as Jesse led Myra forward. "Will you give up your accustomed place by Miranda's side to her?"

"S'pose I'll hev to ef you say so. I'd like to be perlite to the gal, though I don't expect to find it very comfortable bunkin' on the floor myself."

"Go inside," said Jesse, "and remember, young woman, that any attempt to escape will be attended with fatal results."

Myra did as she was bidden, and soon stood in the presence of a woman whose countenance was the most forbidding of any female she had ever looked upon; and it can be truthfully added that her hostess did not look upon her with much favor either.

When Bill's wish was made known she became very indignant; but as former experience with the famous robber had proved the futility of successfully disputing his desires, she gave in as gracefully as she could, and allowed Myra to creep in beside her.

Despite the girl's serious situation, she slept soundly until morning.

"Now, Bob," said Jesse, after a hearty breakfast, "haul out your box, and let's divvy up. We are all anxious to see the color of gold again."

The robbers gathered around while Bob undid the fastenings of the box.

As the lid came up, every eye was fixed in expectation of seeing the long hoped for money, the cash that would keep them in idleness for many a day; then simultaneously a shout of execration came from their lips.

What had become of the money?

Bob dropped the lid in consternation, his face as pale as death.

"Where is the traitor?" he hissed, drawing his weapon. "I'll have his heart's blood."

The bandits looked at each other doubtingly.

Who was the thief?

"Wait!" cried Jim. "I thought I saw a note, at least a piece of paper lying on top of the rubbish. Let us see what it contains."

This he immediately secured, and unfolding it, he read the words:

"John Belton presents his compliments with the contents of this box, and hopes the band will be as uniformly successful in the future as they have been in this instance."

Then from each pair of lips came a choice selection of oaths, such as terrified Myra, who had just arisen; even Miranda paused, though it must be confessed, half in admiration, at the torrent of profanity that overflowed the cabin.

"That explains it," said Bill, in a sudden lull. "Oh, that man's the devil!"

"We'll never regain our self respect until we wipe him out," remarked Jesse grimly.

"I'd like, for my own information, to know how many times he has to be wiped out before he finally turns up his toes," put in Cole Younger.

"So much the greater reason why we should attend to the matter now in hand," said Bob, who had in a manner regained his composure. "Belton may bide his time, for he is behind us; Northfield is in our front."

"True," was Bill's observation. "We must make a clean sweep of the bank to-day in order to compensate us for the loss of last night."

After a lengthy consultation it was decided that the owner of the cabin, Jake Sims, should take charge of Myra and detain her as a prisoner.

Should they be successful in their descent upon the bank, they would return and take her away with them, unless they should be too closely pursued, and in case they did not come back in a reasonable length of time, he was to take her away in the night and leave her where she could find her way home.

Being thus misled as to the position of his house, she could not well lodge any complaint against him, and he would thus escape the charge of complicity or be free even from suspicion.

"If that man Belton comes along," said Jesse, in

parting, "just draw a bead on him, Jake, and we'll be your eternal debtors. We've tried to remove him, but he won't be removed by us, at least."

"I'll do my best, sir, if he'll only give me a chance to pick a quarrel with him."

"I'll suggest a way," with a sly look at the others; "just let him get a sight of your good wife, and he'll be for throwing love glances at her immediately. You can play the jealous husband, and pick him off while he isn't looking."

"You will please mind your business," said Miranda, sharply. "And you, Jake, ef you've no more sperit than to listen quietly to sich foolishness, you wouldn't hev the sand to shoot a flea!"

With a loud laugh the men set spurs to their horses, and galloped away on the errand which proved to be one of death to a noble, unoffending man, and of final dissolution to their own organization.

The sun shone as brightly, the birds sang as sweetly, the woods rang as gayly, as if there was no intimation in nature of the terrible tragedy that was in a few short hours to blot the fair name of Minnesota; that was to add one more murder to the awful list already charged to these men.

Had they known what was before them would they have paused?

Who knows?

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A BRUTAL MURDER.

The 7th of September, 1876. The sun rose in calm splendor over the quiet village of Northfield.

The inhabitants awoke and went about their usual employments, the men to their daily business, the women to their housework, and the children to their day's enjoyment, all unconscious of the dark and terrible tragedy that overhung the place, and was to cause among them such confusion and horrible anguish as had never been their portion.

The morning passed as mornings will, and when

the hour of noon was at hand, three horsemen rode up to an inn on the outskirts of the town, dismounted, and after giving their steeds in charge of the hostler, entered the house.

They were, of course, talkative, and as the toothsome dinner brightened their wits, they became louder and more demonstrative in their conversation.

Who were these people?

Jesse James, Bob Younger, and Charlie Pitts, three men well calculated to carry out any plot that required boldness as well as strategy.

By and by their talk drifted into politics, and their host, who had been serving the meal, became all attention.

"This is going to be a bad year for the Radicals," remarked Jesse, with a vicious lunge at a piece of meat, as if he would exterminate the said party with as much gusto as he was devouring the choice steak before him.

"On what do you base your opinion?" asked Bob, quietly.

"On general principles, of course. That party has been in power so long that it is rotten with arrogance and corruption; it has treated the Southern States with the iron hand of despotism, and created a system of carpet-bagism that any people with true manhood would resist to the death."

"Good reasoning, until you look on the other side," was Bob's answer. "How much has it done for the country?"

"Slain hundreds of thousands of innocent people!"

"In a just cause."

"Oh, you talk too much," Charlie interrupted. "Let money talk. Who cares what the party has or hasn't done? They're all corrupt, anyhow, and don't care for anything but your votes."

"That's just it; who's going to get the majority?"

"I've a hundred that says Tilden will usher the grand old Democratic party into power next election," Jesse said, banteringly.

"And I have another hundred that says with the

eagle's scream that he never will!" rejoined Bob, excitedly.

"Let me hold the stakes; you know I'm a member of the Greenback party," Charlie put in, with a laugh. "Under the circumstances I would be the most appropriate selection you could make, unless our good host seems a more honest man than I."

The innkeeper replied, with much modesty, that in his opinion the two would make a very wise choice in selecting their companion as stakeholder.

"By the way," said Bob, turning to him, "I have a draft to send away, and wish to make a deposit for that purpose; what bank would you recommend to me?"

The host's countenance brightened.

"The First National Bank is the place where I keep my deposits, and I don't hesitate to recommend it highly. Mr. Haywood is the squarest man I know of, and he's the cashier of the institution."

"Square man, eh?" asked Jesse, inconsequentially.

"To the very bone. Haywood's my friend, but I'd say the same if he were my enemy."

"Lot's of grit, I reckon?"

"Plenty of it. Nobody that I know of ever had the opportunity of calling him a coward, and yet he is kindness itself."

"I'm glad to meet a man of such a character, and hope to cultivate his acquaintance. I have some notion of settling down in this place, and nothing would suit me better than to get in with such men."

"What may your business be, stranger?" asked the landlord, curiously.

"I'm a broker; these gentlemen are merely traveling with me, bent on pleasure as much as anything else."

Some new arrival now called the host away, and on his departure the trio looked at each other significantly.

"So he's grit to the backbone," murmured Jesse. "We may have some tough work before us, boys."

"A pistol placed under his nose will bring him to terms quickly enough," said Charlie.

"That's the programme, anyhow, and if we can keep the citizens from interfering with us, I haven't the least doubt that we'll carry off the swag, as we've done many a time before."

"What fools people are, anyway," said Bob, contemplatively. "Think of that affair in Kansas City where seven men stole the money box at the State fair, and carried it right off in the presence of hundreds of spectators. A few men of the right kind of grit would have ended their career then and there."

"True enough; but who's going to be the first one to court death?" asked Charlie. "I suspect that if we were not armed, we'd feel like getting out of the way, too."

"Well, boys, I sometimes think the inevitable end cannot be far off. The pitcher that goes so often to the well must be broken at last. We've been in many a scrape, but luck or some unseen power has always been on our side."

"Not always, Jesse. Think of the Iron Mountain train tragedy. You remember how hot the detectives were on our track, and how tough a fight we had with them at Osceola before we got away? There poor brother John lost his life, and Jim came near having to pass in his checks, too. We got even with them, however, as more than one of them bit the dust that day."

"You got off better at Gad's Hill, though."

Bob smiled.

"Oh, yes; we did well enough there."

"I reckon, too, that almost everything has happened to me but death," said Jesse. "I've been shot at, and hit as well as missed, and more than once have been left for dead, but that good angel of mine has always come to my rescue. How much longer will it stay with me?"

At that moment a party of five entered the dining-room, and without a glance of recognition at the others, sat down to their meal.

The trio arose and passed out on the porch where, after smoking and standing about for a time, they were joined by the other five.

Their horses were now called for, and mounting

them the party bade the innkeeper a good-day, and rode away.

Down the highway they trotted leisurely until they reached the bridge under which the Cannon River flows, and here at a given signal the band broke into a gallop, and dashed along the principal street of the village until they reached the First National Bank, all the time shooting promiscuously, and shouting at such people as they met to withdraw into their houses.

Alarmed at this wild and warlike demonstration, the inhabitants could scarcely do otherwise than comply with such peremptory orders, and consequently the robbers were not then interfered with; but such a storm was brewing, the results of which, could they have been foreseen, would certainly have deterred even such reckless persons as they from attempting to carry out their bold purposes.

Jesse, Bob and Charlie threw themselves from their horses, and entered the bank, while the rest remained seated, and by their continuous fusillade prevented the approach of any possible intruders.

The trio jumped over the counter into the very presence of the astonished officials, who numbered three: Mr. Haywood, the cashier; his assistant, Mr. Bunker, and a clerk by the name of Wilcox.

"Throw up your hands!" cried Jesse, flourishing his revolver.

The looks of the men were so threatening that this command was obeyed.

"What is the meaning of this?" said Mr. Haywood, sternly.

"You will see," was Jesse's reply, as Bob approached the vault.

At once the heroic cashier understood that the object of the outlaws was plunder, and, regardless of consequences, he leaped toward the vault into which Bob was just stepping, and attempted to close the door on him.

He would have been successful had not Jesse, who for reasons of his own had chosen not to shoot the man, leaped up behind and struck him a cruel blow with the butt of his revolver.

Haywood fell, partially stunned, but in a few seconds was on his feet, prepared to do battle with the intended robbers.

Two of them now seized him, and in spite of his vigorous resistance dragged him to the door of the vault.

"Now," cried Jesse, with an oath, "open the inner door!"

"I will not," was the intrepid answer.

"You must!"

"I'll die first!"

In an instant Jesse raised his revolver, and fired close to the cashier's head, with the idea of intimidating him.

"Will you open it now?"

"Never!"

Bob drew a murderous looking knife from his pocket, and flashed it in front of the doomed man's throat, but he never flinched, although the weapon did make a mark from which the blood oozed.

"Don't you know what you are inviting?" asked Jesse, beside himself with rage.

"I cannot say; death, I suppose."

"You're right. Now save yourself, or I'll cut your throat from ear to ear."

"I can only die doing my duty."

At this moment Mr. Bunker, who, in company with the clerk, were being kept in subjection by a revolver in the hands of Pitts, seeing that he might, by creating a disturbance, direct attention from the cashier, who was in imminent danger of instant death, leaped from his place, and darted to the back door; but just as he was disappearing, a bullet from Pitts' weapon struck him in the leg.

Heroically he dashed on, and escaped from the building.

"For the last time will you open that door?" asked Jesse, in tones that fully intimated his intentions.

"I cannot."

"You will not?"

"I will not!"

"Then die!"

A shot rang through the building, and the brave cashier lay a victim to their untamable ferocity.

"You've spoiled it all now," Bob cried, as he gazed ruefully from the prostrate form to the inner door, the means of opening which had been forever lost to them.

Jesse uttered a frightful oath.

"Served him right for his stubbornness. Now let's search for ourselves."

But only a small box half filled with nickels was all the booty they found, and in disgust Jesse poured its contents over Mr. Haywood's corpse.

"Hello, boys! do you hear that?" cried Charlie, suddenly.

Bob and Jesse paused.

"Our fellows are meeting with resistance. Let's leave this place," and without a word they all leaped over the counter, and ran out to the street.

It was indeed time.

The people had begun now to regain their senses and to provide means for repelling if not capturing the daring intruders.

A young physician, Dr. Wheeler, whose office was in the second story of the building immediately opposite the bank, noticed the shooting and the unusual excitement going on in the street below, and came to the window.

As soon as he grasped the situation he seized an old shotgun that stood in his office.

Taking deliberate aim, for he saw that the case was desperate, he fired at one of the bandits. Clell Miller gave a wild yell of agony, reeled in his saddle, and uttered the words:

"Boys, I'm done for!"

With this he fell face forward from his saddle, a fit expiation for the foul murder that had just been committed.

Dr. Wheeler, giving expression to a smile of satisfaction at the success of his marksmanship, fired again, and Bill Chadwell, who had piloted the robbers in their travels through Minnesota, fell from his horse mortally wounded.

Others were now gathering, fully armed and de-

terminated to wreak vengeance for such bold brigandage.

Another robber was wounded, but he was at once thrown across the horse of one of his comrades, and afterward carried away.

Affairs were in this critical condition when the trio came to the door; without the delay of an instant they were in their saddles.

Eight robbers had entered that little town but a few minutes before, bent on an errand that was fraught with awful danger to innocent citizens as well as themselves; two of their party were left behind in the cold embrace of death, and a like number of the inhabitants of Northfield, mute witnesses of civilized man's rapacity.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FLIGHT OF THE OUTLAWS.

For once the bandits had made a fatal mistake in their course of rapine and murder.

In leaving the wilds of Missouri for the fields of Minnesota they were exchanging a perfect knowledge of the topography of one State for absolute ignorance of the other, and this was certainly an egregious blunder.

The man who had been their chosen leader and knew every foot of ground in his own State lay dead in the streets of Northfield.

They had looked to him for a safe pilotage, and now they were thrown upon their own resources.

To make matters worse, the citizens of Northfield were fully aroused and bent on exterminating a band which had hitherto defied the efforts of detectives and civil authorities.

When the six robbers rode out of the bereaved village, fifty men were armed and ready to pursue them to death; but by the time they were mounted on trusty horses, the band had secured considerable of a start.

"Boys," said Frank James, with a serious face,

"this is a critical situation for us to be in. What's to be done?"

"Safest, in my opinion, to separate," said Jesse. "The whole country will be aroused now in these days of the telegraph, and if we stay together we are more apt to be taken or killed than if each one took his own way, and sought the most out-of-the-way places. By that means we may be finally able to leave the State."

"I object to this," put in Coleman Younger. "Here's Jim, wounded almost to death, and I propose to stay by him even if the others leave us. Besides, we'd best stay together and terrify any band that dares attack us. We're as good as twenty men yet."

"That's my opinion, too," asseverated Bob. "Let's try it another day, and if we are pressed too hard it will be time then to separate."

This was agreed to, and the party pushed on.

In the meantime the news of the tragedy had spread with wonderful rapidity.

There was excitement throughout the State.

The Governor at once offered a reward of one thousand dollars for each of the robbers, or six thousand for all of them, and many a band with aspirations for fame and fortune sought to capture the murderers.

Besides, there was behind them constantly that terrible avenging party who thought not of reward, the party of Northfield men who had determined that their mission would end only when those ruthless destroyers should cease to exist except in the annals of history.

Under these circumstances, with a merciless enemy in their rear and unknown dangers on all sides, it was no wonder that they felt their situation to be a most serious one.

All thought of taking Myra Ferry with them to be held for a ransom was rejected; and they pushed on as fast as their horses could carry them, carefully avoiding all places where they imagined news of their depredations had been received.

Day and night they traveled with untiring zeal,

now avoiding this village, now that, creeping away unseen from this party, boldly attacking that, now advancing, now retreating, but with wonderful skill working their way slowly forward.

Jim Younger was bleeding profusely from his wounds, and his life was almost despaired of, but they deserted him not, though his blood served as a guiding trail to their pursuers.

Finally they arrived at the village of Shieldsville, and not knowing whether the people were prepared to resist or capture them, with their characteristic recklessness they dashed through the one street, shouting like demons and firing in every direction. They finally disappeared in the distance before the astonished inhabitants knew what had happened.

Onward they flew, urging their tired horses forward with such vehemence that at the end of a week the poor animals became useless to them, and were cast aside.

They were now on foot and in the direst extremity.

Hunger pressed upon them sorely, for they had been forced often to subsist upon the herbs of the field.

"This is awful, boys," said Bob. "I can't, for one, stand it any longer, so this farmhouse must serve as a commissary department, even if we are killed in the attempt to get a mouthful."

"Let's avoid it," said another, suspiciously; "there may be armed people concealed about the place."

"Hadn't we as well die in that way, then, if die we must? I'd rather be killed with a bullet than be consumed with this terrible gnawing at my vitals."

With the words he started forward in the lead of the others.

A woman was standing in the yard, and seemed somewhat alarmed at the approach of such a formidable party.

"My good woman," said Bob, politely, "will you be so obliging as to sell us a chicken? I see you can well spare one."

In an instant thoughts of robbers entered the

woman's mind, and with a shriek of terror she fled into the house.

Hardly had she disappeared when the door was thrown open, and two men stood on the threshold with leveled weapons.

It was too late for the forlorn robbers to retreat, but they did the best they could, desiring to get away without any further bloodshed if possible.

Two shots rang out on the still air, and the James boys staggered from the serious wounds they received.

Willing hands seized them, however, and they were soon out of the range of the deadly weapons.

For another day they pushed forward with weakened powers, and then a final consultation was held.

"We've come to it at last, boys," said Jesse. "We must separate. We've tried to get away by sticking together, but we are about used up, and still in the most imminent danger of capture or death."

"What say you?" asked Coleman, looking about him questioningly.

Not a dissenting voice was raised.

They divided into two parties, the James boys taking one direction and the Younger boys with Charlie Pitts going in another.

"Farewell, boys; we'll meet you in the sweet by and by!" cried one, whose heart and face belied his cheerful words.

This good-by was indeed the last that the two parties ever addressed to each other.

Each one hurried forward to the fate that was in store for him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HOME AGAIN.

Belton and his comrade were somewhat taken aback at the awkward dilemma which stared them in the face, but they had no misgivings as to the final result; three determined men could not long

be cowed by a single woman, no matter how much in earnest she might be.

"Well," said Belton, looking at Jake with a smile of the deepest unconcern, "your good wife seems to have the drop on us at present, if she doesn't lose her grip."

Jake grinned.

"You'd better skin out, or she'll pull the trigger, sure."

"She isn't so cruel as all that?"

"You don't know Miranda, I guess."

"No, but I hope to make her acquaintance shortly."

"You will, but it won't be in a way that you'll hanker for again."

"Nonsense! She and I will get along famously when we come to know each other better."

"Now, strangers," cried the sharp-visaged Miranda, "air ye goin' to stand all day there?"

"My good female," said Belton, blandly, "we are doing exactly what you told us a moment ago."

"Now, I tell you to move on."

Belton took a step in her direction.

"This way, do you mean?"

"No, clear out of hyer, or I'll shoot!" she cried, fingering her weapon nervously.

At this juncture she uttered a shriek of wild alarm, and began struggling violently, for a pair of strong arms had suddenly been thrown about her, and a pair of iron hands grasped hers.

The revolver fell to the ground, and was harmlessly discharged, and before Jake knew what had taken place he was seized and in a trice was laid upon the earth, a pair of handcuffs encircling his wrists.

"Well done, Howard," said Belton, as he now hastened to Theo's assistance, for it was indeed Theo, who, by creeping in quietly at the back of the house while the altercation was going on, had been able to take Miranda by surprise.

"You've gotten us out of an awkward not to say dangerous predicament. She might have caused us a heap of trouble."

"She has plenty of muscle," rejoined the young man, as he helped to secure the panting and thoroughly furious woman.

"You must really pardon my abrupt entrance," he continued, addressing Miranda, "for the case was a very urgent one. Let me assure you that no harm or personal indignity is intended you, and as soon as our search has been completed you will be released, doubtless."

"What do you accuse us of, anyhow?" she demanded. "Stealin'?"

"Oh, no; worse than that. We want the young woman who is concealed here, and that with your knowledge."

"Find her, then," she said, stubbornly, seeing that resistance to the inevitable would be the height of folly.

"Watch the couple," ordered Belton, "and I'll see in a jiffy whether Miss Ferry is here or not."

He was inside of the house ere he had finished speaking, and had opened the door of an inner apartment, the one sleeping room of the dwelling.

Here stood Myra, trembling with fear at the evident disturbance outside, and expecting every moment that an unfriendly face would appear at the door to summon her to a fate worse than that which had already overtaken her.

When she beheld the eager and smiling countenance of Belton, her joy knew no bounds.

"My best friend!" she cried. "How can I thank you for this deliverance and the hope of again meeting with my dear relatives?"

"By not mentioning it," was the answer, as the detective cut the rope that held her hands together.

"Now, I'll leave you here a while. I must go back to attend to a prisoner or two I have caught, and would like to have you remain here."

"Will you tell me where Mr. Howard is before you go?" she asked, with a blush. "I am very much afraid he was badly injured last night."

Belton smiled mysteriously.

"When I saw him last he was quite well. The

blow he received was not a serious one, and he soon recovered. But excuse me for a moment."

Scarcely had he disappeared when the door was again darkened.

Myra looked up quickly, and then gave utterance to a cry of joy that caused the two detectives to smile in very sympathy.

"That's enough to repay a man for a whole year of imprisonment," remarked Jones.

"I'll warrant young Howard thinks so himself."

"My darling," was Theo's warm salutation, "I can now for the first time take you in my arms, and tell you how rejoiced I am to be reunited to you, never again, I hope, to be parted. All the troubles and deprivations to which I have been subjected during the past few weeks are more than compensated for by the joy of this moment."

Myra hid her face on his shoulder, and uttered a prayer of thankfulness with the flow of happy tears that came from her eyes.

"To Providence first," she murmured; "and then to you and the dear friends who have risked so much for me."

"I have just learned how much I owe to you and your earnest belief that I was the victim of foul play. I can now understand how and why a woman's love is so strong and undying," stroking the beautiful head with a fondness that showed he was not far behind her in the love that should bind true hearts together.

"Whatever sacrifice I made for you, whatever pangs I have suffered, were in your behalf; you were so much to me that I felt it almost impossible to live without you."

"Unworthy, unworthy!" muttered Theo, with downcast looks.

But before he could proceed further a knock was heard at the door, and a voice from Belton suggesting that they should be on the move at once, on account of a possible return of the outlaws; with this hint they made hasty preparations for departure.

"How many horses have you, Jake?" asked Belton.

"Haven't none," growled the farmer.

"Oh, come, now; don't attempt to stuff us in that style. You can't farm without horses. I'll give you any reasonable sum if you'll sell us what you've got."

"If I had any you'd steal 'em right before my eyes."

"No, I mean business with you, if you don't prove stubborn."

Jake still looked somewhat doubtful, but Belton finally convinced him that he was really in earnest, and so they at last struck a bargain.

He was to sell his entire stock, which consisted of three horses, to the party for the sum of four hundred dollars, and on being released for the purpose, he called the animals in from the pasture, and prepared them for the journey.

Theo then counted out the money and passed it over to the old fellow, who pocketed it with a satisfaction that clearly showed how fortunate he considered himself in getting off so easily.

With a friendly warning to the couple, Belton rode off in the lead, followed in turn by Jones, who was seated on a nag that showed a disposition every few moments to lie down and rest, while Theo and Myra brought up the rear on the third horse, which objected decidedly to carrying double; but the little party got on famously, and in spite of some few difficulties which were from the necessities of the case forced upon them, they found it infinitely preferable to walking.

They stopped over night at a farmhouse, and early next day reached the city, tired out, but rejoiced to find that their present troubles were over.

Theo embraced the earliest opportunity of making a confession to Myra of all his misdeeds committed during the past six months, taking particular pains not to smooth anything over; and it may be assumed as granted that she gave him a full pardon in view of the circumstances under which he had been placed and the peculiar temptations to which he had been subjected.

The joy of Myra's parents at the appearance of

their lost daughter cannot be described, but the wonderful experience of Theo was the subject of conversation throughout the town for many a day, and congratulations poured in upon him on account not only of his lucky escape from the perils which had surrounded him, but also of the good fortune which had befallen him in spite of the plot to deprive him of it.

Dr. Hinds, who for days had been quaking in his boots at the probable consequences of his imprudence in trusting so implicitly in strangers, no matter how honest their looks, was called upon to congratulate himself on the receipt of the news that the money left by Samuel Howard had finally reached the proper heir without the loss of a cent, and he was still more pleased a few days later to become the recipient of a check for a thousand dollars as a reward for his share of the work in discovering Theo, and providing for the settling of the money.

Three months later Theo and Myra were married, and the intervening years that have passed over their heads have fully demonstrated the wisdom of Myra's choice; for her husband has risen rapidly from one position to another, until the citizens of his town look upon him as one of their most generous, influential, and honorable men.

Irene suffered the penalty of her misdeeds, and the wonderful beauty which had once been hers is gone forever. Should you wish to find her, go among the slums of the city, for she has indeed fallen low.

And now we leave these characters to gather up the last threads of our story, the last scenes in a life, which, though possessed of superior ability, had in it too many of the elements of evil to allow that ability to be manifested on the side of justice, honor and morality.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CAPTURED AT LAST.

Onward the dreary quartet pushed, weighed down by hunger, weakened by wounds, and discouraged

by the untiring Nemesis that was pursuing them in the shape of stern and pitiless and bereaved men.

Turn where they might these determined foes stared them in the face, ready in a moment of forgetfulness to pounce upon and annihilate them.

Hardly dared they sleep lest the morning's sun should find them in the damp, cold embrace of the final destroyer; scarcely dared they come from out their cover into the glare of day lest the weapon of an avenger should select them for its victim.

Thus they crept from bush to bush, from tree to tree, now scudding across an open field, now crouching in a ditch as they caught sight of a human being.

Despairing, they fought against despair, starving to death, they bravely walked upright, though their stomachs were empty.

The courage that had led them safely through many a scene of carnage and blood did not desert them in this their direst extremity.

They knew that defeat was inevitable, but the blood of the ferocious tiger ran in their veins; they would give up when they could no longer stand.

They looked into each other's weary eyes, but not one read a sign of surrender there; they took hold of each other's hands; they whispered words of encouragement one to the other, but in the countenances of all was depicted the indubitable result.

And now they had taken their last stand.

Advance was impossible; retreat was out of the question, and they dumbly stood waiting for the final attack.

It came with the force of a hurricane.

Fifty men against four.

Half a hundred fresh human beings, flushed with certain victory and sure vengeance, against a quartet of almost dying men.

Their last shots were being fired as they slowly retreated from the leaden hail out into the open prairie, but they stood shoulder to shoulder, determined to live or die together.

Suddenly Jim Younger uttered a cry of anguish, staggered and fell.

He had been struck in the face by a ball and seriously though not fatally wounded.

The others had no time to stanch the flow of blood, for the enemy was almost upon them.

A few moments later Charlie Pitts threw up his hands with a cry of such agony as told the survivors that he had met his death blow.

The end had come; the two remaining brothers, badly wounded, but fighting still, were overpowered, and the victorious avengers carried them with Jim off the field.

The survivors had expected instant death, though they received it not.

They were removed to a neighboring town, where they were thrown into prison, and for three months they lay there suffering in body from the terrible wounds they had received in their last flight from justice, as well, perhaps, as enduring the pangs of an awakened conscience.

At the end of this time they were taken before the court of Rice County to be tried for the crimes which had been committed in that State.

Death, though averted for a time, gaped at them in a more horrible form.

They had not flinched from his grasp in the heat of battle, when the blood of excitement coursed through their veins and words of execration and vengeance rose to their lips; but death at the end of a rope; ah, that was a different thing!

A lawyer who had been engaged to defend the boys paid them a visit.

"You are in a most critical situation, gentlemen."

"We know it."

"They'll hang you if it ever comes to a trial."

"We'll have to hang, then."

"That would be foolish when you can escape such a fate."

"Is escape possible?"

"Certainly. Nothing easier."

"Give us the means, and we will get out of this place quickly enough."

"Well, now, you are taking too much for granted."

I can only promise you escape from death by hanging."

"How is that?"

"By pleading guilty to the crimes you have committed."

"Never!"

"It is a matter of life and death with you; and when a man is in such a situation he need not be at all delicate regarding the means of escape, so that it becomes an accomplished fact."

"Will that secure our point?"

"Certainly. The State law of Minnesota is such that if a murderer pleads guilty the death penalty cannot be inflicted, but imprisonment for life is substituted as the punishment. Now, should you refuse to follow my advice you will surely be convicted, and the consequent penalty ensues. Should imprisonment be the sentence it would not surprise me much to find that a few years' exemplary life in the penitentiary would enable you to pass out from its walls free men. Be guided by my advice."

It was a bitter struggle with pride and passion arranged against the better judgment of the felons, but judgment won the day, and when the lawyer left it was with the understanding that his clients should throw themselves upon the clemency of the court by a full confession.

This was done, and one day the iron doors of the gloomy penitentiary at Stillwater opened to receive them into its dark and fearful abode, a life of silence to atone in part for a life of ceaseless and murderous activity.

Has the atonement been ample?

Has justice been satisfied?

Does the blood of the slain still cry to Heaven for vengeance?

Who can answer that question?

Man has done what as a community of civilized society he thought sufficient. The expiation is not yet complete; two brothers are still paying the penalty of their crimes—the third? Alas! death comes to all sooner or later.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BOB YOUNGER'S FATE.

The 16th of September, 1889.

A life slowly ebbing away.

A soul striving to break from its tenement of clay.

A criminal paying his final earthly penalty.

Bob Younger has been in prison for thirteen years, how long, how dark, how dreary, no one but Bob Younger knows.

A young man when he entered, full of life and health and vigor, now prematurely old, emaciated by the dread disease consumption, and certain that he has not many hours, possibly not many minutes to live.

During all this time he has been a model prisoner, performing his work faithfully, and proving most docile under the care of the prison officials.

He has won the good will of the warden, who is with him in his last moments, and the two brothers who stood beside him in the heat of battle, plotted with him in the silence of mountain and prairie fastnesses against their fellows, shared hunger and privation, wealth and prosperity with him, roystered together in glorious victory, fell together in bitter defeat, are here to cheer him with what words of comfort they can bring to their sorrowful lips from out their sorrowing hearts.

The sister, who, mayhap, has wept many a time over his dreadful misdeeds, or, who knows, even gloried in his fiery spirit and warlike prowess, is here to close his eyes after their last look upon the world which he has wronged so grievously.

These thirteen lonely years have proved, to the credit of the dying jail-bird, a most wonderful contrast to the years of violence that had gone to make up the record of his previous life.

During seven years of this time he has devoted much of his leisure to the study of medicine, which he took up systematically and thoroughly, reading text-books and subscribing for periodicals on the subject.

Many an hour that should have been given to rest of bodily and mental powers has been applied to a course of study which he could hardly hope to put in practice.

It is true that his friends have made many vigorous and determined efforts to secure his release from prison, a largely-signed petition having been sent to the Governor of the State with that object in view; and Bob's efforts to educate himself may have been with the ultimate idea of putting his acquired knowledge into practical operation should he be pardoned; but fortunately or not for him, fortunately or not for the world, the pardon never came.

The Governor in his wisdom saw fit to disregard the petition, and as an example to all evil doers we would commend him for his firmness and sense of right. If the administrators of law in all our States were thus firm in performing the functions of their office without fear or favor, there would be fewer criminals and fewer crimes.

When the news of the Governor's refusal to interfere came, with a resignation that was wonderful he laid aside all hope of life, all hope of being able to walk the green earth again a free man.

Perhaps the knowledge that he had not long to live may have solaced his last hours, and taken off the keen edge of grief at being forced to die in the prison cell.

The way of the transgressor is indeed hard.

A year before his death Bob's health began to fail, and a listlessness that had heretofore been foreign to him ensued.

It was not long until it became painfully evident both to him and his friends that he was within the grasp of that foe to which so many fall victims, consumption.

When it was seen that human remedies could only

alleviate his pain without being able to prolong his life, he was urged to enter the hospital.

He at first refused, but the entreaties of his friends finally prevailed, and there he received the best of attention.

On this the evening of his last day on earth it seems that he realized how near grim death was to him. His physical powers began to droop, and he felt the chill of final dissolution approach with rapid tread.

His sister and his two brothers had been with him, but now, as six o'clock came, they arose to leave.

"Don't go," he said, weakly; "I have not more than four hours to live, and I want to have you with me until the last."

And they, though scarcely believing that he was so soon to die, remained.

From that moment they could plainly see that his strength was failing rapidly, his breathing less distinct, his features more plainly marked with the grim monster's touch.

As the hour of nine approached deputy warden Westby entered the room, and Bob, who had been the recipient of many a deed of kindness at his hands, gave him a welcoming glance from his failing eyes.

"Stay with me till the end," he whispered, feebly. "It will not be more than an hour now."

The deputy nodded acquiescence, and stepped aside, so that the dying man's relatives might be nearest him in his last moments; but Bob was so dissatisfied with this, that the official was obliged to change his position in order that the felon might have him continually in sight.

Thus the minutes dragged by, the silence broken only by an occasional sob from the grief-stricken sister, or a faint whisper from the dying man who seemed to be preternaturally conscious when dissolution would take place.

Little by little the light waned from out his eyes; little by little the breath left his body and less returned; little by little his life ebbed away, until a few minutes before ten, he passed quietly from

earthly scenes as if he had fallen into a calm slumber.

With scalding tears the sister arose and closed the dead eyes of him who might have been much to the world in the best sense.

The same faithful sister a few days later accompanied his remains to their last resting-place in Missouri, the State which had suffered most from his depredations.

And there we leave him, a sad monument to evil doing, a solemn warning to evil doers. He will long remain a prominent figure in the history of his native State, but not one to whom his fellow citizens can point with pride as having lived for his fellow men.

The most pitiable of all earthly things is a mis-spent life; yet perhaps the sorrowful fate of one man may have accomplished its mission if it serves as a guide-post to direct the wavering youth in the path of honesty and moral rectitude.

(THE END.)

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